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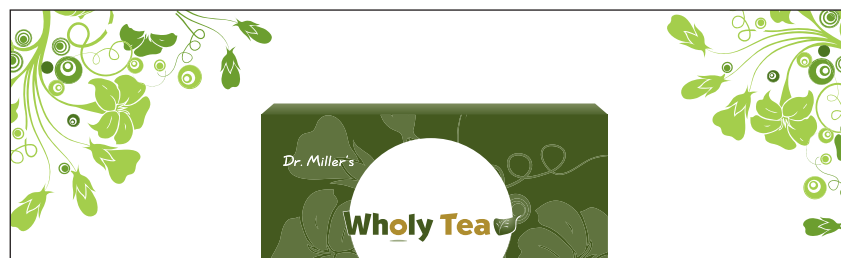


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GMO Myths & Truths

by Michael Antoniou, Claire Robinson and John Fagan

There is a movement growing.

The National Farmer Union represents independent food producers who do not want multi-national chemical agribusinesses bullying them into buying genetically patented seeds, pesticides and herbicide. NFU's recent Ottawa conference focused on "Growing the Resistance" to the corporate takeover of Canada's small and medium size family-run farms by the soulless corporations that only care about making money and gaining power. Their corporate marketing disguises their agenda with claims of saving the starving children of the world. The NFU works for development of economic and social policies that will maintain the family farm as the primary food-producing unit in Canada. NFU protects farmers like Percy Schmeiser of Bruno, Saskatchewan who got sued by Monsanto in 2000.

Two top ex-government scientists began a truth telling GMO tour speaking to packed houses. The second leg of their tour is eastern BC and Alberta this December (see map below; let family and friends know to attend). Common Ground broke the silence on GMO in 2000 by hosting NFB's film *The Genetic Takeover* followed by a lively debate. We need to push back against this genetic

takeover. The time to act is now: grow the awareness, grow the message, and grow the movement to take back control of our food. As the National Farmers Union poster says, it's "Our communities. Our country. Our world. Our economy." And it's our food.

- Common Ground.

About the authors

Michael Antoniou, PhD, is a reader in molecular genetics and head of the Gene Expression and Therapy Group at King's College London School of Medicine in London, UK. He has 28 years' experience in the use of genetic engineering technology investigating gene organization and control, with over 40 peer reviewed publications of original work and holds inventor status on a number of gene expression biotechnology patents. Dr. Antoniou has a large network of collaborators in industry and academia who are making use of his discoveries in gene control mechanisms for the production of research, diagnostic and therapeutic products and safe and efficacious human somatic gene therapy for inherited and acquired genetic disorders.

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Open Source. She has a background in investigative reporting and the communication of topics relating to public health, science and policy and the environment. She is an editor at GMWatch (www.gmwatch.org), a public information service on issues relating to genetic modification, and was formerly managing editor at *SpinProfiles* (now Powerbase.org).

John Fagan, PhD, is a leading authority on sustainability in the food system, biosafety and GMO testing. He is founder and chief scientific officer of one of the world's first GMO testing and certification companies, through which he has pioneered the development of innovative tools to verify and advance food purity, safety and sustainability. He co-founded Earth Open Source, which uses open source collaboration to advance sustainable food production. Earlier, he conducted cancer research at the US National Institutes of Health. He holds a PhD in biochemistry and molecular and cell biology from Cornell University.

Earth Open Source

Earth Open Source is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to assuring the sustain- *continued p.31...*



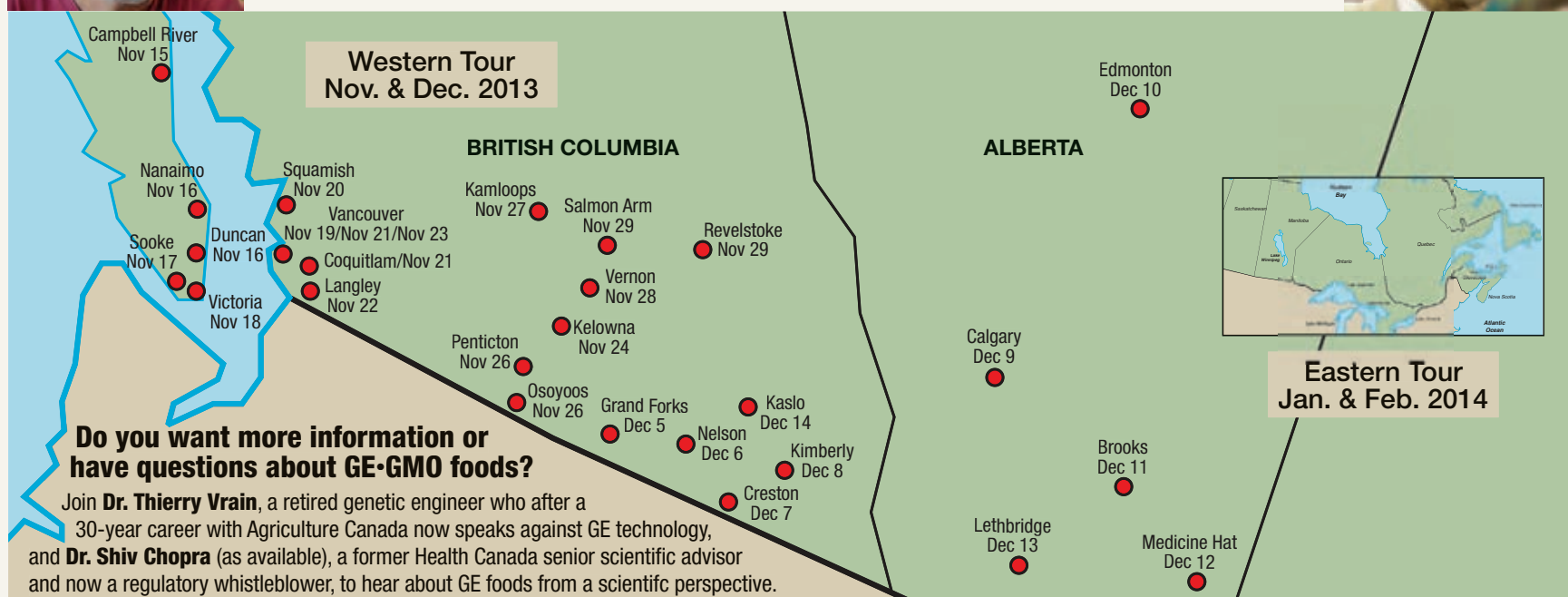
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Cover design by Kris Kozak.

We all eat for a living

Our culture is at a crossroad. We must become aware of the serious situation facing the future of our food. Global genetic corporations plan to take over our food supply by patenting the very seeds we depend upon. We need to act now or become slaves, colonized by a few very large companies whose main goals is to control agriculture for their own profits... these are the same companies who dumped millions of

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dollars to kill GMO labeling referendums in California and Washington. GMOs threaten natural, organic and even conventional crops.

Common Ground has uncovered an excellent document *GMO Myths and Truths*; an evidence based examination of the claims made for the safety and efficacy of genetically modified crops. Use this tool to pick through the frozen corporate science PR bubble.

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Pharma's feedbag

Who's really paying for that 'free lunch' for doctors?

As they say, "There's no free lunch." Unless you're a doctor or work in a doctor's office, that is.

Welcome to the world of pharmaceutical marketing, which smells a lot like curry dishes and baked delicacies. Pharma marketing involves a lot of food that costs a lot of money, but guess what? (And this is the most interesting part of the story). Nobody pays any taxes on that money.

Not paying taxes? Most doctors I know are outstanding members of the community who care about people and want to do what's right. But many of them are enjoying a free lunch, almost everyday, paid for by taxpayers.

It's pretty clear, based on the statistics of marketing and promotions I've seen, that doctors get a lot of gifts from the pharmaceutical industry. At least two-thirds of the money spent marketing pharmaceuticals (about \$3 billion per year in Canada) goes towards the salaries of pharmaceutical sales people, the gas for their cars and the free drug samples and food they deliver to our doctors.

If you get a gift and don't pay taxes on it, you might call that a perk, a nice little thing that comes with the territory. And you might never report it to Revenue Canada, thinking it's small and you deserve it. But if you get gifts in a large, expensive, systematic way and don't pay taxes on them, you would probably think Revenue Canada would find it worth looking into. And in this business, where the drug industry gives our doctors gifts, writes them off as a 'business expense' and won't pay taxes on them, the taxpayer is defrauded twice.

Put it this way; you do a job for me and I pay you with a \$100 bag of candy, then (depending on your personal tax rate) you probably owe the government \$30, \$40 or even \$50. After all, being paid in merchandise is still being paid. And whenever money changes hands, we all understand there is a cut we have to give to the govern-

ment. It's the way the world works and those taxes pay for the services we all enjoy.

So it is perplexing to me that the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency hasn't seemed to pay any attention to the marketing tactics of the world's multinational pharmaceutical industry. There is probably no larger, more obvious, exchange of gifts anywhere in society yet those gifts are never monetized or taxed.

Let's bring this down to Earth. Ever visited your doctor's office near lunchtime and smelled Thai curry or fresh pizza wafting out from the staff room? By my calculation, probably up to a third of our doctors – and their staff – are eating for 'free' almost every day of the week. (If anyone out there has better data on this, please send it to me.) Some doctors, medical office assistants and nurses in a busy physician's office are likely not paying for their own lunch more than a day or two per week.

Don't believe me? Ask the owners of catering businesses in big cities like Victoria, Vancouver, Richmond and Kelowna how much of their business consists of making delicious lunches for drug companies to buy and serve to doctors. And there will be your answer.

If you feel poorer because as a taxpayer you have paid for all these Thai curries, deli sandwiches and elegant salads, you might also feel irritated about Canadians paying the second-highest prices in the world for their drugs. Shelling out even more of your money for a delicious, 'free' lunch for your doctor and his office staff (while it's a write-off for the company who bought it) feels somewhat unsavoury. And all that money spent on food just gets added to the cost of the drugs. How much is this costing us?

Let's do some back-of-the-envelope calculations. There are about 70,000 doctors in Canada. Let's say only half of them dine occasionally on free lunches provided by smiling drug salespeople. For that half, on average, two to three meals a week

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*Reference: Anti-Influenza virus activities of commercial oregano oils and their carriers. Journal of Applied Pharmaceutical Science 2012; 02(07) 214-18.

are dropped off. Some offices I have visited have 'free' lunches every day of the week; others might have only one or two on average so let's say our doctors and their staff are eating 2.5 lunches per week for 'free.' And let's say the average lunch per person costs \$15 (including drinks), though I have seen meals so lip smacking they are probably worth twice that. And let's say the 'average' doctor has one 'staff' (though larger clinics would likely have more). And let's say they eat like this for 48 weeks per year because they take a month off for holidays and presumably buy their own food while on holidays. What is the cost of the 'free' lunches for Canadian doctors each year?

Seventy thousand (35,000 doctors and 35,000 staff) X 2.5 meals per week X \$15 per meal X 48 = \$126,000,000. So just to recap, the 'free' meals provided to our doctors in Canada by Pfizer, Glaxo, Eli Lilly and other pharmaceutical companies are worth \$126 million per year. Could be more, could be less, but let's work with that number for now. But only about half the doctors are eating for free so if you calculate that amount per doctor who chows down on pharma's free food, it works out to about \$3,600 per year per doctor who dines on pharma's dime, by my envelope calculations.

Again, as far as I can tell, those doctors pay no tax on that \$3,600 gift every year. Nothing. Nada. Not a red cent. It doesn't appear the Canadian government considers provisions of free food worth \$126 million per year to be taxable.

At least two-thirds of the money spent marketing pharmaceuticals (about \$3 billion per year in Canada) goes towards the salaries of pharmaceutical sales people, the gas for their cars and the free drug samples and food they deliver to our doctors.

What if they made a small change to the law and asked doctors to pay taxes on all that free food they and their staff consume every week? Typically, doctors are in high tax brackets so let's say 50% of the value of the meal should be taxable. That works out to about \$63 million per year in government revenues. Not bad, eh?

Or what if we changed the law and told the companies they can't write off \$126 million per year in free food to doctors? After all, if the doctors aren't paying tax on it, someone has to and it might as well be the companies supplying it.

Either way, it's time we say the days of free lunches are over. Most doctors can pay for food for themselves and their staff and would likely do so if they knew they would be taxed on the 'freebies' given to them by pharmaceutical companies.

Of course, that's just for food. Now, do we want to get into the real big-ticket items? The value of the free drug samples dropped off every week is likely hundreds of millions per year. Nobody pays any tax on that and the pharmaceutical industry can write it off (at full retail value) even if a \$10 pill costs them two cents to make.

Good gig, huh?

Let's be clear. The Canadian government wants to make as much money out of oil sands, resource extraction and pipelines as it can. The government claims these revenues are important to pay for the roads, bridges, schools and hospitals we all need to keep our citizens productive and happy.

Let me suggest another kind of mining for resources.

I think there is a mother lode of potential profit in closing tax loopholes so our doctors and the drug companies aren't allowed to avoid paying millions every year in unpaid taxes. Is there not a huge amount of potential in redistributing the money big pharma is sloshing around in our doctors' offices to pay for many schools, roads and bridges?

That is, if the government is bold enough to go after it. [K](#)

Alan Cassels is a pharmaceutical policy researcher and has never, to his knowledge, eaten a pharma-funded sandwich.

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"I am a victim of paramilitaries and the guerrilla."
Message from a Wayúu woman.

A few words on Human Rights

by Bruce Mason

Photos: Juan Pablo Gutiérrez/
Amnesty International Canada

“A picture’s worth a thousand words,” Confucius observed. But sometimes there’s more than meets the eye and big pictures require text, as well.

For example: “This is What We Want to Tell You,” the powerful Amnesty International Canada/National Indigenous Organization of Colombia photo exhibition, available to communities, coast, to coast. It’s a case where words are urgent, including your own, to stop Canada’s ongoing complicity in “social cleansing,” exacerbated by a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and subsequent deals..

“State security forces are firing on people, the number of injured keeps growing. We’re in shock. It’s a state of emergency,” reported exhibit photographer Juan Pablo Gutiérrez in a recent phone call to Amnesty’s Toronto office..

Describing the call as “grim, the tension palpable,” Kathy Price – Amnesty Columbia campaigner – says: “Only days earlier, he miraculously escaped a shooting on the vehicle in which he was traveling.

“Indigenous people across the country took to the streets publicly protesting repeated failures by the Colombian government to uphold promises,” Price explains. “Paramilitaries wrote to demonstrators to

return to their communities within 24 hours or face “social cleansing,” threats that have to be taken incredibly seriously, given their bloody record.”

In 2009, Colombia’s Constitutional Court determined 34 Indigenous nations in imminent danger of “extermination, an emergency which is as serious as it is invisible.” It ordered government to act, but protection hasn’t been implemented.

To make the injustices visible, Gutiérrez took photos. People in 12 images remain anonymous but “speak” directly to Canadians, “face to face,” sharing heartfelt, hand-written messages. In a decade, more than 90,000 Indigenous people have been driven from lands vital to their identity and livelihoods. Massacres, assassinations and other atrocities have decimated communities and are linked to resource development megaprojects.

A man in one Gutiérrez photograph wrote: “People of Canada, the Zenu people need your support.” Pressure from Canadians will make a significant difference, particularly given the “special” relationship between the two governments.

The Zenú have suffered in defending their territory and rights. In 2009, the Constitutional Court gave the government six months to devise *continued p.34...*

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GMO BITES

GM apple update

The US government has taken one more step towards approving the GM “non-browning” apple. On November 8, the U.S. Department of Agriculture invited the US public to comment on a draft environmental assessment of the GM apple. CBAN and the Society for a GE Free BC issued a press release that pointed out the GM apple is also being reviewed by the Canadian government, but the process in Canada will not involve any similar public consultations and the Canadian government will not release any environmental assessments or other documents before it makes its final decision. Friends of the Earth U.S. (www.foe.org)

The high number of positive results in our small sample size alerts consumers to the fact they could be unknowingly buying GM sweet corn. At the very least, GM sweet corn should be clearly labelled so consumers can make a choice.

also released statements from McDonalds and Gerber saying the companies do not have plans to use the GM apple.

The BC Fruit Growers’ Association (BCFGA) has asked federal Health Minister Rona Ambrose and Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz to immediately stop the federal regulatory process needed for approval of the non-browning GM apple. “Our concern is the negative publicity for apples in general caused by the controversy over this GM apple,” said Jeet Dukhia, BCFGAs president. “There is potential market damage caused to apple markets if this GM apple is approved. Indeed, it seems the damage is occurring even while the apple is in the regulatory process and a decision on its approval is still pending. The public thinks of apples as a pure, natural, healthy and nutritional fruit. GM apples are a risk to our market image.”

Complaint in Panama raises concerns about GM fish research in Canada

On November 21, The Environmental Advocacy Center of Panama (Centro de Incidencia Ambiental de Panama or CIAM) submitted a complaint to the National Environmental Authority in Panama alleging the US company AquaBounty is in breach of environmental regulations in its research and development of genetically modified (GM) Atlantic salmon. AquaBounty has a research facility in Prince Edward Island where it produces GM salmon eggs. The eggs are shipped to its Panama location for further research and development.

Tests discover unlabelled GM sweet corn in Canadian stores and farmers’ markets

Tests have found unlabelled genetically modified (GM) sweet corn in grocery stores, roadside stands and farmers’ markets across Canada, says the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN).

“Our testing clearly shows GM sweet corn is present in Canada,” said Lucy Sharratt of CBAN. “The high number of positive results in our small sample size alerts consumers to the fact they could be unknowingly buying GM sweet corn. At the very least, GM sweet corn should be clearly labelled so consumers can make a choice.”

The purpose of CBAN’s test was to get an indication of the presence of genetically modified (also called genetically engineered) fresh sweet corn in Canada. “Our sample size was small and random but shows a clear presence of GM sweet corn, across provinces and types of vendors,” said CBAN researcher Taarini Chopra. “The results don’t tell us how much of Canada’s sweet corn is GM, but

they do tell us that it’s out there, in both grocery stores and farmers markets.”

CBAN tested 43 samples of conventional fresh sweet corn. Half were from Ontario, the rest from BC, Alberta and Nova Scotia. The samples were purchased from outlets of major grocery chains (Loblaw, Walmart and Sobeys) as well as some smaller, independent grocery stores, farmers’ markets and roadside stands.

15 of the 43 samples tested positive. This means that approximately 35% of these sweet corn samples were genetically modified.

GM sweet corn was discovered in samples purchased from Loblaw stores.

GM sweet corn was also present in samples from farmers markets and roadside stands.

Various samples from all four provinces where samples were collected – Ontario, BC, Nova Scotia and Alberta – tested positive.

Testing of samples from Sobeys and Walmart did not find GM sweet corn.

Results are not statistically significant but provide a snapshot of GM sweet corn in Canada, in the absence of mandatory GM food labelling and any government tracking, including statistics on GM crop cultivation.

The tests were conducted by CBAN staff at a lab in Waterloo, Ontario, using strip tests for the GM protein Cry1Ab.

Until recently, GM corn grown in Canada was predominantly field corn, which is used for animal feed, processed-food ingredients and biofuels. GM sweet corn is the first GM whole food grown in Canada and raises new questions for consumers about possible health risks. The sweet corn is genetically engineered with genes from the Bt bacteria to produce proteins that make it toxic to some insects.

“Some farmers might be planting GM sweet corn without knowing that it’s genetically modified or being aware of the consumer concerns,” said Sharratt. ◀

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Gluten-free celebration

With 1% of the population having celiac disease, 0.1% having a true wheat allergy and an estimated 0.5 to 30% – depending on the estimator – having gluten sensitivity, holiday meals can pose a challenge. The hearty, flavourful entree below will be welcomed by the vegetarians on your guest list as well as everyone else. Both recipes are from *Food Allergy Survival Guide* (Melina, Stepaniak and Aronson).

Sensational Stuffed Squash (Makes 5-6 servings)

The shape and colour of buttercup squash make an impressive showpiece for special occasions. Serve with gravy (below) and perhaps cranberry sauce. Double for a larger group.

- 3-pound buttercup squash
- 1 cup water
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1/4 cup white rice
- 1/4 cup quinoa
- 1/4 cup toasted sunflower seeds or chopped nuts
- 1/4 cup chopped, oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes
- 2 tbsp. chopped, fresh parsley
- 1 1/2 tsp. olive oil
- 1/2 tsp. basil
- 1/4 tsp. oregano
- 1/4 tsp. crushed garlic
- Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350°F. Pierce the top of the squash with a sharp knife at a 45-degree angle. Pushing the knife blade away, rotate the blade around the top of the squash and remove the cone-shaped top. Slice off fibrous material from the cone and set top aside. With large spoon, scoop out seeds and fibrous pulp from cavity of squash; discard. Place squash and top on a baking sheet; bake for 30 minutes then remove from oven and leave to cool for 15 minutes.

While squash bakes, place water, onion, rice and quinoa in large pot and bring to a boil. Lower heat to medium; cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and let rest, covered, for 10 minutes. Fluff with a fork; add remaining ingredients.

Spoon stuffing into squash until



almost full. Set squash top in place and bake for 50 to 60 minutes or until a toothpick can be inserted easily into the side of the squash. Place any leftover stuffing in a small pan, sprinkle with 2 to 3 tbsp. water, cover and heat through for the last 20 minutes of the squash cooking time. Remove squash from the oven; place on a warm platter. Slice into wedges to serve.

Savory Chickpea Gravy (Makes about 3 1/2 cups)

This tasty gravy is great on potatoes, rice, vegetables, beans and stuffed squash. The ingredients and preparation are a little unusual, but it comes together well. Chickpea flour tastes terrible raw, but tastes fine as soon as it is cooked.

- 3-4 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 onions, small, diced
- 1 cup chickpea flour
- 1 tsp. dried sage
- 1/2 tsp. each of thyme and rosemary, crumbled
- 1/4 tsp. pepper
- 3 1/2 cups hot water
- 2-3 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- Salt (to taste)

Place oil and onion in a large saucepan over medium heat; cook until the onion starts to brown. Stir in flour, sage, thyme, rosemary and pepper, stirring constantly to form a smooth, thick paste. Cook over medium heat until lightly

toasted, about 5 to 10 minutes or until flour no longer tastes raw. Remove from heat. With a whisk or fork, gradually stir in the hot water, mixing carefully to avoid lumps. Add the vinegars and salt to taste. Warm over medium heat, whisking occasionally, until hot and bubbly. Add more water, if needed, to achieve the desired consistency.

Variations

- Replace some or all of the salt with chickpea miso, thinned with a little water, to taste.
- Replace 1 tbsp. of the balsamic vinegar with umeboshi plum vinegar. [K](#)

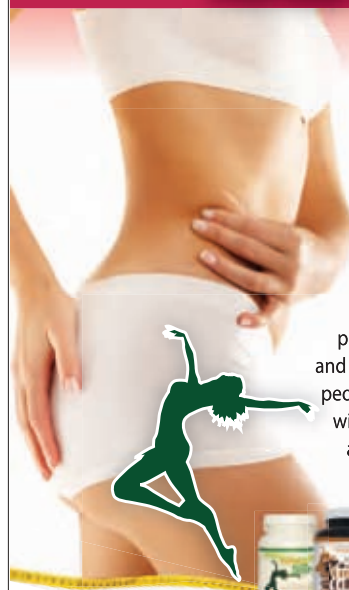
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Wild Salmon Warrior News Adam S. Sealey

Canada – purveyor of Frankensalmon

With genetically engineered Atlantic salmon expected to be approved for sale in the US any day now, and possibly soon here in Canada, Environment Canada has now approved the commercial production of genetically modified (GM) Atlantic salmon eggs by AquaBounty in their PEI facility. This is an alarming decision, making Canada the source of global environmental risk, says the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) and the PEI group Islanders Say No to Frankenfish.

“We are extremely disappointed and alarmed that our government has approved the production of GM fish eggs. GM salmon egg production in Canada endangers the future of wild Atlantic salmon around the world,” says Lucy Sharratt of CBAN.

In November, CBAN sent letters to both the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Health, requesting they answer the question – which they have so far refused to answer – “Is your department reviewing a request to approve GM fish/fish eggs?”

Environment Canada’s approval, published on November 23 in the *Canada Gazette*, is the first government go-ahead for the company AquaBounty. This is all based on the company’s plan to produce the GM fish eggs in PEI and ship them to Panama for grow-out and processing. They would then ship the GM farmed salmon back up to the US and Canada for consumption. This has to be the most deplorable and alarming example of a corporation trying to own part of what once was the natural food system: the commons.

GM salmon could put even more pressure on marine ecosystems. The fast-growing GM salmon could consume up to five times more food than other farmed salmon; because salmon are carnivorous they actually eat large amounts of wild-harvested fish like anchovies and sardines and great quantities of these will have to be caught just to feed them. This is not sustainable. And even if a tiny fraction of them escape and mate with other fish, as has been shown to occur with brown

If fully approved for production and consumption, the GM salmon would be the first GM food animal in the world.


trout, what are the long-term implications? Nobody knows.

“We’re devastated that Prince Edward Island is now officially the home of the Frankenfish,” said Leo Broderick of the PEI group Islanders Say No. “We don’t want our Island to be the source of this dangerous, living pollution.”

The PEI facility already produces GM salmon eggs for research, which are shipped to the company’s Panama location for further research and development. If fully approved for production and consumption, the GM salmon would be the first GM food animal in the world. Many other GM fish are in the works and the lack of public consultation in this first case sets a very troubling precedent.

“It’s unacceptable that this incredibly important decision was made in total secrecy and without any public consultation,” says Sharratt.

Critics have long warned the process of genetic engineering itself could possibly result in increased allergenicity and AquaBounty’s own data point to this potential in their GM salmon.

Dr. Michael Hansen, senior staff scientist at Consumers Union US, says, “The FDA is relying on woefully inadequate data. There is sloppy science, small sample sizes and questionable practices.” For example, the company used insensitive tests to try and measure the levels of growth hormone in the GM salmon and the levels of IGF-1, a hormone linked to a number of cancers. 

Express your concerns by writing to the Environment Minister, Hon. Leona Aglukkaq, at www.cban.ca/Resources/Topics/GE-Fish/Write-the-Minister-of-the-Environment

www.commonground.ca

GMO focus must now shift to outright ban, not just labeling

by Paul H. LeMay

With the “defeat” of citizens’ initiative 522 in Washington state in the first week of November, it’s important to keep in mind that Washington’s final mail-in ballot tally rang in at 48.92% in favour of GMO labelling on food products and 51.08% opposed. That result came about largely because big biotech companies and big junk food companies such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi as well as Nestlé and General Mills collectively contributed \$22 million to the “No” side’s shock-and-awe advertising blitz. That campaign was specifically designed to sow genetically modified seeds of doubt in the minds of voters. Doubts



... the campaign was specifically designed to sow genetically modified seeds of doubt in the minds of voters.

about the negative impacts that would come if people came to know what they were eating and drinking.

So where to go next? Some prominent opponents of GMOs, such as doctors Thierry Vrain and Shiv Chopra, insist the focus must now shift to banning all GMO products entirely until they can be proven safe. Allowing them to simply be labelled, they say, confers upon them an implied measure of scientific acceptability as far as their safety goes. They also note these products have not yet been properly tested in Canada in independent long-term safety studies, where the results are openly published. The Canadian government is actually in contravention of its own statutory and regulatory obligations in this regard. What’s more, the government’s failure to protect the health of its citizens likely also represents a violation of article seven of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees security of the person.

Interestingly, the so-called referendum failures in California and Washington state should actually serve as a wake-up to elected officials here in Canada. For example, it’s worth remembering that nearly half of the populations in both states did vote for labelling.

Remember, 48.92% voted for GMO food labels and 51.08% voted against in Washington state while in California it was only fractionally lower – 48.6% for labelling, 51.4% against. In some countries, political parties win power with less than 40% of the popular vote, our own included.

It’s also worth remembering biotech didn’t win these states cheaply. They spent around \$40 million dollars in California, about a dollar per state inhabitant.

In Washington, the per capita cost actually went up to about three dollars per inhabitant. In other words, it took more money per person to eke out what amounted to be a slightly worse result. What’s more, of the No Campaign’s war chest, \$22 million had to come from outside Washington state as only \$700 dollars apparently came from within state. The Yes side had \$5.8 million from out of state contributors while \$2.6 million came from in-state. Imagine what the outcome might have been if the state had a law banning out of state contributions altogether.

In my book, that means biotech can only hold its ground at increasing expense, never a good sign when waging a war.

Many supporters of the I-522 GMO labelling initiative have been critical of the overly “nice-guy” message the proponents of the Yes side adopted. They say they should have made greater use of the health risk message that fuelled political opinion in Europe. This information translated either into complete bans of GMO products in some European states, or at minimum, their mandatory labelling.

Gauging from my own anecdotal experience hearing about mothers of young children who become alarmed when they learn about the poisons they were feeding to their kids, I am convinced the Yes on I-522 campaign should have emphasized these damning aspects of GMOs.

Particularly disheartening is the poor voter turnout in Washington – 45.16%. And we’re talking about an über convenient mail-in ballot here, not a get-your-keister down to the voting station exercise. Moreover, since older folks tend to vote more than younger folks, it suggests that apathy among the young is a major reason the initiative didn’t pass.

I find it really odd. In a country where medical care doesn’t come cheap to the person that gets sick, if this segment of the population more fully grasped the health risks associated with eating GMOs, they might well have been more motivated to support the labelling initiative.

Yet going on about the should haves and could haves is only useful if they’re used as lessons when it comes to the next steps. And there will be next steps. Washington State’s I-522 proponents have already vowed to bring another similar initiative forward in 2016. Let’s hope they use the interval to figure out which particular kinds of messages will get everyone to feel motivated enough to vote in support of GMO labelling.

As for Canada, each of us must write our own Member of Parliament on the matter, calling on them to protect the health of Canadians by insisting on the funding of transparent, independent research on all GMOs now in our food supply. They should also write the Canadian Medical Association, the B.C. Medical

Association, the B.C. College of Physicians, the Royal Canadian College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Canadian Nurses Association. Ask them to make their members aware of the long-term animal feeding research coming out of Europe and that GMO foods may be implicated in the reported increased incidence rate of various diseases and the burdens and cost pressures these impose on our health care system.

Paul H. LeMay is an independent science writer. He recently completed a book on the victimization process, co-written with a psychiatrist in Ottawa. He also writes for the **Hill Times** in Ottawa.

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On the Garden Path Carolyn Herriot

ORGANICS



Reimagining the future

They say the 60s are the new 40s so at the start of yet another year, in my sixth decade of life, I have decided to reinvent myself. However, it came as a bit of a shock to discover this rebirth also involves a change of residence. Timing is everything in life so I checked my body and it said, "Yes." It had one more garden to create." – good to know!

Timing is everything in real estate too. I researched real estate on Vancouver Island – in a 'buyer's market,' with record low interest rates – until I nearly drove myself mad. The problem: I wasn't sure what I was looking for. I soon discovered that, by moving away from the city (of Victoria) across Malahat Mountain, the price of real estate drops dramatically and by moving into a different jurisdiction, zoning restrictions change too.

After much searching, we found a 'dream' home in Yellow Point and we'll soon be starting a new life in the Cowichan Valley region. The rural residential zoning in the CVRD opens up many possibilities for home-based business – think B&B, tea garden, gift shop, garden, school/nursery or art studio. There's even an authentic English pub – The Crow and Gate – at the end of the road and every Sunday, in season, they hold a vibrant Farmers' Market.

It's surprising to discover that 'micro-businesses' generate more than a quarter of the province of BC's GDP.

After we fell in love with the house, we discovered that, for the past 25 years, our neighbours have organized a Christmas tour of artisans, over four days of fun, weaving in and out of all the local studios, shops, galleries and farms; this happens throughout the summer months too. (Visit www.cyartisans.com) What a great way to get to know your neighbours and also continue to make a 'Zero-Mile Living.'

I recently became aware of the vital role small business – defined as those that employ 50 people or fewer – plays in BC's communities: 385,100 small businesses in BC represent 98 percent of all businesses in the province, employing over a million people. Four out of five small businesses can be further categorized as 'micro-businesses' that employ five people or less; 56 percent of these are self-employed with no paid employees. It's surprising to discover that 'micro-businesses' generate more than a quarter of the province of BC's GDP. (www.resourcecentre.gov.bc.ca/pdf/SmallBusEngWeb.pdf).

Small businesses also play a key role in upholding the quality of life locally. These business owners invest in their communities by supporting local events and festivities and sponsoring sports and arts events. When you 'buy local,' you also get the intangible benefit of bettering everyone's quality of life. When we support small businesses, we see people face-to-face and they become people we know we can trust. Considering the contamination and poor quality of food produced by our prevalent centralized, industrialized food system, there's no better time to put our food back into the hands of our local communities.

Could it get any better than this for us? Yes! The zoning in the CVRD also allows for a legal secondary suite and a second single-family residence on the five acres. Now we can consider community living into old age and be able to stay in our home sharing with people who will take care of each other.

It's inspiring to know what can happen when you decide to reimagine the future. ◀

Carolyn Herriot is author of **The Zero-Mile Diet** and **The Zero-Mile Diet Cookbook** (Harbour Publishing). She currently grows 'Seeds of Victoria' at the Garden Path Centre. www.seedsofvictoria.com

Just now

an interview with Eckhart Tolle

To read Eckhart Tolle's latest column, please see the current print edition of *Common Ground*. For copyright reasons, we are authorized to publish this column in our print version only.

JR: In your new book, I feel like you're the modern equivalent of the explorers that came to the new world, but an explorer and documenter of consciousness, discovering a new world.

ET: Yes, discovering is the right word. It's not that you need to make a great effort to attain it or bring it about or acquire it. It's discovering it's already there in you – conscious awareness that's obscured, or partially obscured, in many people. It's a discovery of something already there.

It's like waking up after a dream, because identification with the thinking mind and its stories and the old emotional conditioning is like being immersed in a kind of dream world, which very often turns into a nightmare – acting out old conditioned patterns again and again. The whole structure of the egoic mind is an old dysfunction.

There's some evidence that the ego started about 6,000 years ago, but nobody can say for sure. Before that, humans were in a state of innocence. When we go beyond the dysfunction of the ego, we regain our original innocence, but on a much deeper level. This is why Jesus said unless we become as little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

So, returning to the original innocence, and at the same time going much deeper into that with full awareness – that's the process. We're coming out of thousands of years of dreadful suffering, almost the whole of recorded history of humanity. If you really look at it in an unbiased way, as if you'd never seen it before, one cannot but admit that, to a large extent, 80 to 90 percent of it is a history of pathological insanity, the suffering that humans have created for themselves and, of course, inflicting it upon others.

JR: And exporting it through colonization to the new world.

ET: Yes, so the important part of the awakening process is the realization of the insanity in human history, collectively, to this day playing itself out in world events. Also, to be aware of the insanity within oneself – old, dysfunctional patterns that come again and again that create suffering. So when you see that you're insane, then you're not completely insane. Sanity comes the moment you realize the fact of insanity. To see insanity is not a negative thing.

JR: At least you're out of denial.

ET: Yes, that's why in the film *A Beautiful Mind*, for example, which is about a mathematical genius who did have a mental dysfunction, his mind was developed in certain areas but he was also insane. The viewer of the film doesn't know that until a certain point when the character realizes that many of his experiences are delusions. At that moment, his healing begins. He's not cured yet, but his healing begins because he's recognized his own insanity. That recognition can only come out of sanity, which is the awareness of unconditioned consciousness.

There's a dimension in us that has nothing to do with content. Self-realization is that I am not that. I'm not my story, not my grievances and hang-ups, not the story of me that I'm telling other people at parties or repeating in my head again and again. That is only form. It's temporary.

When you see what you're not, it's already liberating. Something inside you breathes a sigh of relief. Then, of course, the mind begins to ask, "What are you if you are not that?" It wants an answer. In other words, it wants some new form. It wants a new thought. There must be a thought that I am. But it doesn't work like that. That's why the great book the Tao Te Ching starts with the line that the Tao that can be spoken of is not the true Tao because Tao – in the ancient Chinese way of putting it – is the formless dimension. You could say pure consciousness, but with any term we use we have to be careful it's not mistaken for "It." Otherwise, the mind comes in and says, "Oh, consciousness, yes. I believe that I'm consciousness." It's not another belief. It's finding that spaciousness inside yourself that's there when you let go of identification of form. ◀



Parenting the inner child

The child is in me still and sometimes not so still. – Fred Rogers

The young child acts completely out of ego. It is all about what the child wants or does not want. The point of view of others matters little, if at all.

If it is not going well, the child reacts. The inner child also experiences fear, vulnerability and sometimes abandonment. Coping strategies are developed and the child's view of self is based on the way others respond to him or her. In order to be liked and/or accepted, one needs to please others. The child is totally dependent and whatever the problem, it is the other person's fault for the child cannot see things from the perspective of others.

If we are unaware of this inner child aspect of our being, it continues to influence our attitude and personality – without restraint. This can create havoc in all areas of life, particularly in relationships.

When we take responsibility for the thoughts and feelings of our inner child, we are free to live authentically. We know how to self-nurture and comfort ourselves.

When we are aware of it, we realize our ego reactions stem from the inner child. We can then make the choice to not let this aspect control us. We recognize we also have a higher self or soul consciousness and can choose to view situations from this perspective and respond accordingly.

In order for this to happen, we need to embrace, express and heal our inner child. This means we see the wounds, insecurities, fears, reactions and beliefs that developed long ago and that we still carry on some level.

Instead of looking outside of ourselves for other people, situations or things to make us feel okay, we need to learn to give that feeling to ourselves. This involves being the unconditionally loving and supportive parent to our inner child that we may never have had when we were young.

This means we do not bully ourselves, put ourselves down or compare ourselves to others. We give ourselves positive feedback even when things go wrong. We might say, "That's okay, we will learn from this and move on."

We do not worry what others think of us – we tell the inner child that no matter what, he or she will always have our love and support and we will never leave. We explain to our inner child that it is more important to speak our truth and be authentic than to try to be what others want us to be.

If we are easily hurt by others, feel victimized, take things personally, feel life is not fair, get angry often or blame our unhappiness on others, the inner child is the one in charge. This is a hard way to live because the world simply will not reshape itself to suit our needs.

When we take responsibility for the thoughts and feelings of our inner child, we are free to live authentically. We know how to self-nurture and comfort ourselves. We have the strength to get ourselves out of situations that are not good for us. We look for solutions to problems rather than dwelling on them or blaming others.

We also know the importance of play and doing things we love. We can be the best parent a child could ever want to our own inner child. It is a life changing choice and never too late. ▶

Gwen Randall-Young is an author and psychotherapist in private practice. For articles and information about her books, *Deep Powerful Change Hypnosis* CDs and new "Creating Healthy Relationships" series, visit www.gwen.ca

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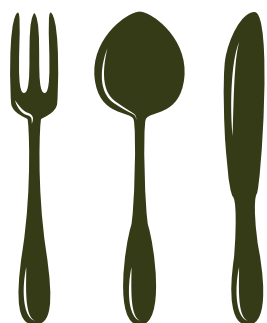
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Mac McLaughlin

ZODIAC

StarWise December 2013

THE SAGITTARIUS new Moon takes place on December 2. The new Moon is best depicted as a seed bursting forth its power and potential in the waxing phase of the lunar cycle. Let's take a look at the symbolism connected to this very dynamic sign. The pictograph of a Centaur pointing an arrow heavenward carries the implication of the transition from animal to spirit. Overcoming the downward pull of the senses and redirecting our attention to the higher realms of truth and spirit is what Sagittarius is all about. A deep longing for righteousness and purity manifests through this sign. Jupiter, king of the gods, rules Sagittarius. The souls born under the stars of Sagittarius often attain great heights and become giants in their spheres of influence. The Jupiter / Sagittarius energy spikes us onwards and upwards as we sort out where we're truly at in the cosmic sphere of things. Perhaps we're lacking in our efforts to do better. We know how easy it is to become distracted, derailed and put off our game. The archer is pointing his arrow heavenward representing his desire to reach the higher realms.

According to the true mystics, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva created the system of stars and universes and all that they imply. The karma we carry with us throughout the incarnations manifests to us via the planets and how they are situated in our birth charts. When the stars and planets are in right alignment, in accordance to our karmic slate, we are birthed in order to work with what we are bringing into this life. When the great mystic Kabir stepped onto the Earth, he saw that no one was happy with their lot. We may grow restless, discontent and dissatisfied with our Earth life. Those that enjoy the wealth and riches and those that exist in poverty may know that their situations are temporary and transitory. In one life, the guard stands in the snowstorm protecting his King. In another life, he is the King and the former King is the guard standing duty.

Things are not as they seem and we're here for a short while and in the blink of an eye we're gone. Now is the time to make amends and to make vows to work towards your true emancipation and freedom. We are love and we are light and we have been given the great boon of human birth. The Sagittarius stars are prompting us to reach for the higher realities. We come from a place high above the stars; one day for sure we will meet there and rejoice.

Mac McLaughlin has been a practising, professional astrologer for more than four decades. His popular **Straight Stars** column ran in Vancouver's largest weekly newspaper for 11 years. Email mac@macsstars.com or call 604-731-1109.

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ARIES Mar 21 - Apr 19

Aries, you have the power and potential to break through any type of barrier. Great changes have already arrived for those born in the first week of Aries. You must use your ability to adapt and make changes where necessary. Stay true to yourself and allow the universe to set things right –and it will.



TAURUS Apr 20 - May 21

A deep, prevailing wisdom has been carved into your soul in the last year or so. Births and deaths, limitations and restrictions have taken place. Duty, diapers and responsibilities dominate your days and you may not mind. There are more opportunities for stability and growth. Chop wood and carry water as the old saying goes.



GEMINI May 22 - Jun 20

The full Moon on December 17 takes place in your sign bringing epiphanies. The Sun moves through your opposite sign Sagittarius signalling a time in which you can let down and relax a bit, or at least you should consider doing so. It's the right time to sort out relationship issues as well.



CANCER Jun 21 - Jul 22

Sun sign columns are generalized and one shoe doesn't fit all. Generalized or not, if I were a Cancer and knew what I knew about planetary influences, I would be on the move and very pro-active about getting myself together in every way. Opportunities for growth, expansion, love and happiness are close at hand.



LEO Jul 23 - Aug 22

The summer of 2014 to the summer 2015 is where you want to get to. The long view looks good if you play your cards right. Think big and think long-term and get working on your plan to make it all happen. Although driven at times, Leo can be quite lazy, just like my cat.



VIRGO Aug 23 - Sep 22

Man does not live by bread alone. His soul needs nurturing as well. You are pragmatic and grounded in your logic, no doubt. But along comes Neptune in your opposite sign Pisces casting his glance your way for at least the next decade. He opens you up to all kinds of new realities and spiritual possibilities.



LIBRA Sep 23 - Oct 22

"Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse." Hopefully, that is the way Christmas will pass. A powerful planetary aspect unfolds at Christmas time and it can indicate a lively time or a time of accidents, fires and clashes of wills or egos. Go easy.



SCORPIO Oct 23 - Nov 21

Saturn continues to make his way through Scorpio. Generally, Saturn teaches us to live with less. Scorpio deeply appreciates a rhythmic order of things. This powerful transit of Saturn will help you put your life together in a healthy, balanced way. It is a challenging time in which you gain wisdom and experience.



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22 - Dec 21

Lord Jupiter moves through your solar eighth house bringing matters of inheritance into play. Plus, the Sagittarius new Moon on December 2 indicates a new start. The full Moon on December 17 will illuminate the pathway ahead. Your desire to get to the deeper truths may have you searching and seeking.



CAPRICORN Dec 22 - Jan 19

A cardinal grand cross takes shape over the holidays. Your sign is very much a part of it and you can expect great changes to come into play as the New Year begins. The planetary aspects are a bit hairy and it may be wise to stay to the side of caution and safety.




AQUARIUS Jan 20 - Feb 19

Saturn's position may keep you in check, as you find ways to work with the powers that be, such as judges, bosses, parents, teachers and others that have some say and sway in your life. Writing and research are featured. Sink your teeth into a hefty topic or two, giving that powerful mind something to do.



PISCES Feb 20 - Mar 20

Jupiter casts a nice energy into your sign for several months. In general, it would be good to step up your game and move towards your goals. Saturn also casts a good ray your way bringing order and stability. Neptune will work to connect to the higher realities concerning spiritual life, devotion and service to others. 

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A shot of Tao

The unheralded virtues of absence

by Geoff Olson

It was a warm summer night on Salt Spring Island. The wine flowed freely as wasps flew reconnaissance missions over dessert dishes. Our host held up her glass and offered us a shot of Tao – a concept, not a drink. “The hollowness of the vessel is as important as the glass itself,” she said, explaining how Taoists appreciated the value of things absent.

When I got home, I plucked a dog-eared copy of the *Tao Te Ching* from a bookshelf, to sharpen my recollection of Lao Tzu’s original words. “The utility of the cart depends on the hollow centre in which the axle turns,” wrote the Chinese sage in sixth century BC. “Clay is moulded into a vessel; the utility of the vessel depends on its hollow interior. Doors and windows are cut out in order to make a house; the utility of the house depends on the empty spaces.

“Thus, while the existence of things may be good, it is the non-existent in them which makes them serviceable.”

This truism may make perfect sense to Taoists, but such notions fit uneasily in westernized brainpans. For most of us, the word “nothing” conjures up a void, an absence, a lack. Nothingness is shorthand for failure, meaninglessness or just plain nihilism. In the secular, scientific mindset, nonexistence is our final destination after a few decades of putzing around on Earth. The slim volume of one’s life is bracketed by twin eternities of nada, like monstrous bookends. To believe otherwise is supposedly superstitious, pseudoscientific or shame-facedly sentimental.

In this view, we make our ways from the crib to the coffin in an eyeblink of geological time, and that’s it. You get only one shot to make the best of it, although from the perspective of a 13 billion-year-old cosmos, you might as well have never existed at all. Good times.

“Nothing is an awe-inspiring yet essentially undigested concept, highly esteemed by writers of an existentialist tendency, but by most others regarded with anxiety, nausea, or panic,” wrote P.L. Heath for his tongue-in-cheek entry on Nothing for the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. “Nobody seems to know how to deal with it (he would, of course) and plain persons generally are reported to have little difficulty in saying, seeing, hearing, and doing nothing.”

The few positive interpretations of ‘nothing’ in western culture are more comic than cosmic. In an

episode from the nineties-era comedy series *Seinfeld*, Jerry and George make a pitch to a television producer for a new series that sounds strangely familiar. “It’s about nothing!” George exclaims, in a meta-level comment on the world he and his friends are embedded in: a sitcom that leverages life’s minor potholes and into epic pitfalls.

“Emptiness” comes off even worse than “nothing” in western lingo. According to Wikipedia, it is “a human condition is a sense of generalized boredom, social alienation and apathy. Feelings of emptiness often accompany dysthymia, depression, loneliness, anhedonia, despair, or other mental/emotional disorders, including schizoid personality disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, schizotypal personality disorder and borderline personality disorder.” That’s a lot of baggage for one word to carry.

Not surprisingly, “emptiness” has different shades of meaning in Asian cultures, particularly Buddhism. The Sanskrit term *Śūnyatā* is commonly translated into English as emptiness, but the meanings branch out – depending on the doctrinal context – to voidness, openness, spaciousness and “thusness.” In Mahayana Buddhism, it commonly means that no person or object has an independent phenomenal existence. All things depend on other things and come into being through

‘mutual arising.’ This idea of mutual interdependence, in different language, is now a fixture in present-day ecology, social sciences and physics. The measurer and the measured are forever entangled, dancing an ontological tango that weaves the world into being.

Atoms are 99.99999 percent empty space. In his 1928 book *The Nature of the Physical World*, Sir Arthur Eddington offered the “parable of the two writing desks.” The first one is the dependable, solid piece of furniture propping up his typewriter. The second was the desk, as imagined by a new generation of physicists, consisting almost entirely of nothingness, with inconceivably small atomic nuclei and electrons separated by empty space a hundred thousand times larger in scale.

“In the world of physics, we watch a shadowgraph performance of familiar life. The shadow of my elbow rests on the shadow-table as the shadow-ink flows over the shadow-paper... The frank realization that physical science is concerned with a world of shadows is one of the most significant of recent advances,” Eddington wrote.

He would have appreciated the mid-century discovery of a subatomic particle called the neutrino – a will-o’-the-wisp that is about as close to nothing as anyone can imagine. A single neutrino can pass through 1,000 light-years of lead without interacting. But how to detect



photo © 72soul

such elusive particles? In a mid-sixties effort to capture neutrinos emitted from the sun, experimental physicists buried a huge tank of perchloroethylene thousands of feet underground in a gold mine in South Dakota, far from the effect of cosmic rays. The detectors installed with the tank didn't catch the neutrinos themselves, but rather the argon isotope created after the extremely improbable collisions with the nuclei of chlorine atoms. It was like waiting for a passing ghost to topple a candlestick in an abandoned mansion, but the physicists' patience won out, revealing the spooky neutrinos' existence.

The elusive subatomic particle inspired the writer John Updike to pen his 1960 poem, *Cosmic Gall*:

Neutrinos, they are very small. / They have no charge and have no mass / And do not interact at all. / The earth is just a silly ball / To them, through which they simply pass, / Like dustmaids down a drafty hall / Or photons through a sheet of glass.

The first neutrino detectors were kludgy, steam-punk-like contraptions compared to CERN's Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland, which has been tasked to hunt for even stranger prey. The seven-story LHC is the plaything of thousands of scientists from across the world. They accelerate protons to speeds close to the speed of light and smash them together in the guts of the LHC. Because energy is equivalent to mass, the high energies of the collisions conjure up bizarre, heavy particles. It's a bit like throwing two clocks against each other to discover new components that were never there to begin with.

Analyzing the results of the impacts, the big brains of the LHC believe they have found the footprints of the Higgs particle, one of the subatomic ancestors of the phenomenal world that is responsible for that convincing 'something' we call "mass."

You could say the job of the largest machine ever built is to interrogate the void – the background to our day-to-day foreground. And as particle physicists plunge into smaller scales of the microworld, astronomers penetrate ever-greater distances into the macroworld. They have discovered that normal matter amounts to less than five percent of the mass-energy of the observable universe; the rest is tied up in something called "dark matter" and "dark energy."

The world we see and interact with – including everything detected by the LHC – appears to be embedded in, or running parallel to, something literally otherworldly, which will most likely require a new physics to describe.

Science has not exorcised magic from the world – it has only succeeded in chasing things "that go bump in the night" to the furthest margins of empirical investigation. According to the most commonly accepted interpretation of quantum theory, subatomic particles don't exist in the common sense of the word until a measurement is performed on them. Weirder yet, so-called "virtual particles" can emerge from a perfect vacuum – the so-called "zero-point field" – as long as they return to the vacuum in a precise amount of time, set within the constraints of a time/energy variant of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.

"So the modern conception of the vacuum is one

of a seething ferment of quantum field activity, with waves surging randomly this way and that," observes Oxford-trained physicist Paul Davies in *New Scientist*. And surprise! Turns out you can get a sort of something from this sort of nothing, at least according to theoretical physicists, who put the birth of the universe – that is, our observable universe – down to a quantum hiccup in the zero-point field. In this view, the vacuum is a well of creative potential that birthed space, time, matter and energy like a stochastic Shiva. In other words, our everyday ideas of 'nothing' and 'something' don't seem to quite work in the language of science.

Paging Lao Tzu: call on the LHC white courtesy telephone.

In his marvellous 2012 book *Why Does the World Exist?* author Jim Holt points to a puzzling property of zilch. "Nothingness, in addition to being the simplest, the least arbitrary, and the most symmetrical of all possible realities, also has the nicest entropy profile," the author observes. In other words, nothing-



Science has not exorcised magic from the world – it has only succeeded in chasing things "that go bump in the night" to the furthest margins of empirical investigation.

ness seems to represent a kind of perfection. Is nothing 'sacred'? Perhaps not in the usual sense of the word, but physicists insist our cosmos exists in a state of "broken symmetry." An archaic 'defect' in the perfectly symmetric void resulted in the Big Bang and its evolutionary after-effects, which includes our world of barking dogs, Bach fugues and baseball games.

The zero-point field is the Tao dressed up in a lab coat with a pocket protector and it's as close to you as your next heartbeat. Our shadow world, like Eddington's shadow desk, contains a creative emptiness at its heart. As Lao Tzu wrote,

The Tao is like a well: / used but never used up. / It is like the eternal void: / filled with infinite possibilities. / It is hidden but always present. / I don't know who gave birth to it. / It is older than God.

At this point, the average person's mind starts spinning like a George Costanza sales pitch. With a universe this balls-to-the-wall bizarre, talk of ghosts and poltergeists is hardly any more challenging than 'squarks' or 'gluinos,' just two of the many theoretical particles drawn up to explain dark matter.

In a seventies-era Pacifica radio broadcast, Zen philosopher Alan Watts mused on the primary strangeness of being a conscious self. "I know that you feel that you are I in just the same way that I feel that I am I. We all have the same background of nothing, we don't

remember having done it before, and yet it has been done before again and again and again, not only before in time but all around us everywhere else in space...

"What has happened once can very well happen again," he said of our sense of singular, subjective being. "If it happened once it's extraordinary, and it's not really very much more extraordinary if it happened all over again..."

The Tao – which is not a 'name' for a 'thing' but rather the underlying dynamism of the universe – eludes final description. We are not separate from this dynamism so when we try to puzzle it out separately from our own consciousness, we get caught up in Möbius strips of logical paradox.

At the beginning of a new millennium, all our previous ideas about matter, energy and mind appear to be up for grabs. Perhaps scientists will come to realize that sentience runs deeper and wider in this cosmos than previously thought. As Watts observed, "The universe is a system which forgets itself and then again remembers anew so there's always constant change and constant variety in the span of time. It also does it in the span of space by looking at itself through every different living organism, giving an all-around view."

Is it possible our widely accepted, negative ideas of Nothingness – particularly, the anticipation our personal extinction at death – underlies a great deal of the sickness infecting western culture? It's likely far more people on Earth fear an eternity of nonexistence more than the fires of a putative Hell. Perhaps the depressive wageslave's gobbling of SSRI drugs is as much a desperate effort to ward off the spectre of emptiness as the First World's resource-grabbing crusades on poor nations, which drive the bread-and-circuses of hypercapitalism.

Drugs, sex, work, gambling, religious fundamentalism and all manner of distractions, analogue and digital, are thrown against the troubling idea of nonexistence. All in a frantic, temporary effort to forget our existential condition.

Emptiness isn't the end of possibility; it's the beginning. Consider the sculptor who sees the hole in a piece of driftwood not as an absence but the seed of an idea. Or the composer who starts with blank sheets of paper and ends with a symphony. Or the mother who sees the vacant corner lot not as a suburban eyesore, but an opportunity to reconnect her community with the dirt under their feet. Or even the teacher who instructs his students to trust the still, central point within themselves. There are millions and millions of people who bind the fractures in our world of broken symmetry with creativity, compassion and care – all of which are species of love. And that's hardly 'nothing.'

It seems to me our overworked, overscheduled, over stimulated culture is long overdue for a shot of Tao. But enough talk. I will leave the closing words to that shadowy figure from sixth century BC: Lao Tzu:

The Tao is like a bellows: / It is empty yet infinitely capable. / The more you use it, the more it produces; / The more you talk of it, the less you understand. / Hold on to the center. ◀

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Getting dirty may be healthy

For much of human history, we lived close to the natural world. As civilization evolved, we became increasingly urbanized and most of us now live in cities. As we've moved away from nature, we've seen a decline in other forms of life. Biodiversity is disappearing. The current rate of loss is perhaps as high as 10,000 times the natural rate... It can be a challenge to communicate why this loss is important. We know species diversity is critical to the healthy functioning of ecosystems that provide services on which humans depend. But could we live with fewer?

According to an article in *Conservation* magazine, there is a link between biodiversity and human health. Ilkka Hanski and his colleagues at the University of Helsinki compared allergies of adolescents living in houses surrounded by biodiverse natural areas to those living in landscapes of lawns and concrete. They found people surrounded by a greater diversity of life were themselves covered with a wider range of different kinds of microbes than those in less diverse surroundings. They were also less likely to exhibit allergies.

What's going on? Discussion of the relationship between biodiversity and human health is not new. Many have theorized our disconnection from nature is leading to a myriad of ailments. Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, says people who spend too little time outdoors experience a range of behavioural problems, which he calls "nature deficit disorder." It fits with theories of modern ecology, which show systems lacking in biodiversity are less resilient, whether they're forests or microbial communities in our stomachs or on our skin. Less resilient systems are more subject to invasion by pathogens or invasive species.


Hanski studied a region in Finland where few people move far. He randomly selected 118 adolescents in an equal number of homes. Some were in the city and others in woods or on farms. The team collected skin swabs from subjects and then measured the biodiversity of plants around each house. Their data revealed a clear pattern: higher native-

plant diversity appeared to be associated with altered microbial composition on the participants' skin, which led, in turn, to lower risk of allergies.

The immune system's primary role is to distinguish deadly species from beneficial, and beneficial from simply innocent. To work effectively, our immune system needs to be "primed" by exposure to a diverse range of organisms at an early age. In this way, it learns to distinguish between good, bad and harmless. If not exposed to a wide array of species, it may mistakenly see a harmless pollen grain as something dangerous and trigger an

We need to... go outside in nature and get dirty – especially kids. Our lives and immune systems will be richer for it.

allergic reaction. We also know that bacteria and fungi compete. Fungi are often associated with allergies and it could be that high diversity of bacteria keeps the fungi in check...

A conclusive explanation for Hanski's observations is not yet available. More research is needed. But we know we evolved in a world full of diverse species and now inhabit one where human activity is altering and destroying an increasing number of plants, animals and habitats. We need to support conservation of natural areas and the diverse forms of life they contain, plant a variety of species in our yards, avoid antibacterial cleaning products and go outside in nature and get dirty – especially kids. Our lives and immune systems will be richer for it. 

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– Kurt Vonnegut

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– Mark Twain

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– Helen Hayes



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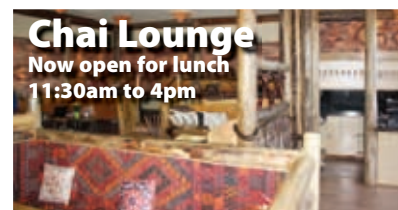
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Best book picks

The Modern Book of the Dead: A Revolutionary Perspective on Death, the Soul and What Really Happens in the Life to Come by Ptolemy Tompkins.

Why Does the World Exist? An Existential Detective Story by Jim Holt.

Rainbow Pie: A Redneck Memoir by Joe Bageant.

I couldn't possibly name a favourite book of all I've read, but I would say every thinking American – and Canadians, too – would profit greatly by reading anything by Joe Bageant, a columnist and author who grew up in the hardscrabble world of West Virginia's underclass. Although he had a big following on the Internet, the east coast literary establishment was incapable of recognizing the republic's heir to Mark Twain. He died in 2011. His books *Deer Hunting With Jesus* and *Rainbow Pie* are required reading for liberal progressives mystified by the rage of the Tea Party demographic. With great wit and word-wizardry, Bageant explains that although the underpaid, overexploited and dumbed-down working class (cannon fodder for America's serial wars) often have the wrong targets, their cross-generational rage is justified.

Alan Cassels (Drug Bust)

A new book I really liked is *Just One Thing: Developing a Buddha Brain One Simple Practice at a Time* by Rick Hanson. One of my favourite books is *The Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollan.

Gwen Randall-Young (Universe Within)

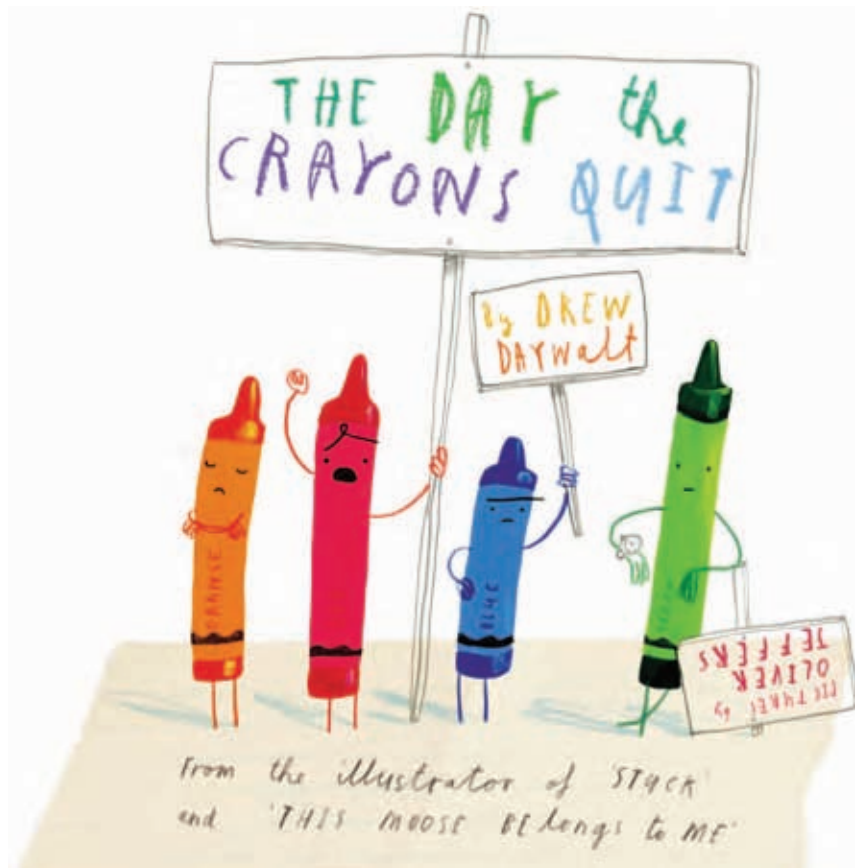
While in Maui, I read *Midnight in St Petersburg* by Vanora Bennett and really enjoyed it. My favourite book, if I had to pick one, would likely be *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran.

Bruce Mason (Music Rising)

The one book I would take to a desert island is *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole because it makes me laugh until I cry every time I pick it up. Without fail. It's a bit of a lost book and I never walk out of a used bookstore without checking to see if they have a copy of this Pulitzer Prize winner.

At the top of the list of best books I read this year is *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki – watch for a Common Ground feature when it comes out in paperback in a few months. She divides her time between Cortez Island and Manhattan and was nominated for

the Booker Prize. Her other novels, *My Year of Meats* and *All Over Creation*, are also big winners in my book. *The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Daywalt is another one of my favourites. It's an instant classic you will love and enjoy sharing with your children and them with theirs. And I just finished an advance copy of *Blessing the Hands That Feed Us: What Eating Closer to Home Can Teach Us About Food, Com-*



munity and Our Place on Earth, by Vicki Robin, who wrote the best-seller *Your Money or Your Life*. Partway through the preface, I requested an interview for next month's *Common Ground*.

"Promoting real books available in independent book shops is a wonderful idea," says the proprietor of Vancouver's invaluable Barbara-Jo's Books to Cooks (www.bookstocooks.com) about *Common Ground's* new book section. "Here are a few I currently find myself peeking into: *Beyond Bacon*, *Paleo Recipes That Respect the Whole Hog*, by Stacy Toth and Matthew McCarry; *The Healing Remedies Sourcebook, Over 1,000 Natural Remedies to Prevent and Cure Common Ailments*, by C. Norman Shealy MD. PhD; *The Deerholme Mushroom Book, From Foraging to Feasting*, by Bill Jones; and *Hamburger Gourmet*, by David Japy, Élodie Rambaud and Victor Garnier."

Finally, pick up a copy of their recommended books

"It's the thought that counts," the old saw advises. Never more appropriate than at this time of year. We know for certain that a common interest and activity of Common Ground readers is reading. And one of the joys of books is recommending our very own "must-read" titles to anyone who will listen. That's why we asked Common Ground contributors to pick through their libraries and minds for their favourites and for the title of the book they haven't been able to put down. It's our gift to you, especially if you're looking for a special gift or something to look forward to in 2014. Compliments of the season!

David Suzuki (Science Matters)

Favourite new book: It tends to be the one I'm just reading. Right now, I'm reading *A Feathered River Across the Sky* by Joel Greenberg about the extinction of the passenger pigeon, another called *The Great Influenza* by John M. Barry about the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 and *Spillover* by David Quammen about zoonosis, the generation of human diseases from other species.

Favourite book: This year, it was Tom King's *The Inconvenient Indian*.

Mac McLaughlin (StarWise)

The new book that I really like is *Love, Light and Life* by Devinder Marendra and Eileen Wigg. It's all about my Guru, Param Sant Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj.

My favourite book is *Life and Death* by Kirpal Singh. It is two books in one: *The Wheel of Life* and *The Mystery of Death*.

Carolyn Herriot (On the Garden Path)

Favourite new book: *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen* by Sylvie Simmons.

Favourite book: *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje.

Sonya Weir (Managing Editor)

Two of my absolute favourite books are *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey* by Jane Goodall and *Gift From the Sea* by Anne Morrow Lindbergh.

Geoff Olson (Feature writer)

My list of favourite recent books include:

This Machine Kills Secrets: How WikiLeaks, Cypherpunks, and Hacktivists Aim to Free the World's Information by Andy Greenberg.

Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other by Sherry Turkle.

list the next time you are in Banyen Books & Sound (www.banyen.com). It's guaranteed to keep avid readers going for a lifetime, or more.

Vesanto Melina (Nutrispeak)

My favourite books are *Walking Vancouver: 36 Strolls to Dynamic Neighborhoods*, *Hip Hangouts*, and *Spectacular Waterfronts* by John Lee; *Only Time Will Tell* by Jeffrey Archer and the series that follows: *The Clifton Chronicles*. Archer is a good storyteller; I listen to the CD version while driving. Another favourite is *Vegan for Her: The Woman's Guide to Being Healthy and Fit on A Plant-Based Diet* by Virginia Messina.

Anthony Sun (Accounting)

My favourite new book is *Worst. Person. Ever* by Douglas Coupland.

Anthony Prosk (Proofreader)

I only read Buddhist philosophy and teachings, particularly those of the Kadampa Lineage written by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. My all time favourite book by him is *Modern Buddhism*, which has been on the bestseller list since its publication and has been translated into 19 languages. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso is a prolific and respected author and in *Modern Buddhism* (his 21st book), he presents the thought of the Buddha in an especially accessible and elegantly stated manner. I totally recommend this book for anyone with an interest in Buddhism for it clearly and succinctly illuminates the very heart of Buddhist thought and practice.

Phil Watson (Advertising)

A new book I enjoyed recently is *Proof of Heaven*, an amazing recollection of the transcendent near-death experience of Dr. Eben Alexander, who miraculously survived a raging brain infection and the deepest of comas. Ever before the skeptical scientist, Dr. Alexander has come back to tell us of levels of existence that will reassure anyone contemplating their mortality. As the descendant of three generations of Methodist ministers, I have always been drawn to books on theology despite my long walkabout away from the church. It was Bruce Sanguin's book *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos* that helped bring me back to the kind of church community I found at Canadian Memorial on the westside of Vancouver. There, I found an "Evolutionary Christian Spirituality" in my experience of the moment-to-moment unfolding of the living universe with no conflict between science and religion.

Adam Sealey (Advertising)

One of my favourite books is *A Brief History of Everything* by Ken Wilber.

Joseph Roberts (Publisher & Founder)

Books continually inspire me. We surf the net but we swim in magazines and books. Here are some that opened my heart, mind and soul. All make great gifts:

Common Sense by Thomas Paine (1776), *Virtual Doonesbury*, by C. B. Trudeau, *The Complete Far Side* by Gary Larson, *Momo* by Michael Ende (author of The Never Ending Story), *Charles Chaplin, My Autobiography*, by Charles Chaplin, *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* by Carl Jung, *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters* by James W. Douglass, *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle, *Getting to Yes* by Roger Fisher, *Trees, Shrubs and Flowers to Know in British Columbia* by C.P. Lyons, *The Canadian Establishment (Volumes 1-3)*, *Izzy, The Secret Mulroney Tapes*, or any other books by Peter C. Newman, *Handbook of Pruning and Cyclopedia of Horticulture* by L. H. Bailey, *The Uncommercial Traveller* by Charles Dickens (1859), *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, *The Lost Science of Money* by Stephen A. Zarlenga, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by William Blake (1793), *The China Study* by T. Colin Campbell, *The Spiritual Seekers Guide* by Steven S. Sadleir, *Super Imperialism or The Bubble and Beyond* by Michael Hudson, *America (The Book) A Citizen's Guide to Democracy Inaction*, a *Daily Show with Jon Stewart* Presentation, *Musical Lesson: Spiritual Growth Through Music* by Victor Wooten, *A Short History of Progress* by Ronald Wright. *GMO Myths and Truths* by Earth Open Source, which inspired this edition of Common Ground. ■

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Meet the current Langley Ukulele Ensemble, the nation's premier uke group that established the City of Langley, BC, as the "Ukulele Capital of Canada." Comprising 20 musicians, aged 13-21, the group performs 50 to 80 concerts a year – in their community, regionally and globally. In addition to travelling across Canada, they visit the continental US, Japan and Hawaii. Search for their YouTube videos to silence anyone who doubts that jaw-dropping and heart-warming virtuoso music can be played on the ukulele.

First encountered it as a tricky word in a childhood spelling bee and was recently embarrassed when told I wasn't saying it properly. It's "u-k-u-l-e-l-e," pronounced "oo-koo-le-lee," but just plain "uke" may be music to your ears. No matter how you say it or spell it, this happy, humble, under-appreciated, much-maligned runt of the guitar family litter is the come-back kid of musical instruments. A tiny little orchestra with a big following, the ukulele is ubiquitous once again, taking star turns as a global fad, or phase. Most likely, though, it's a full-fledged phenomena with legs and staying power. On one hand, a flight from high-tech; on the other, a virtual love child of YouTube.

Now that you can spell it and say it, know this too: You too can play it! Yes you can. You. It's the easiest instrument to learn, according to the *Guinness World Records* book, thankfully replacing the plastic recorders of music education nightmares. Your child and inner child can sing along with this one to virtually every song ever made. Why, you could be strumming a carol or two before the season is out and *Auld Lang Syne* by New Year's Eve.

Almost as important, you can buy a good one for the price of a smart phone. And you can take it anywhere – by backpack, bicycle, plane or on foot –

even to a protest march. No need for charging batteries or untwisting headphones. Lay it on your lap or chest when you lie down to gaze skyward. Pass it on to future generations; it's the best friend you will find in 2014.

Where to start? See *Common Ground's* October issue (www.commonground.ca) and re-read Lynn McGown's wonderfully inspiring article "Yes, you can sing." Substitute "play ukulele" for "sing." Lynn approves. Personalize her poetic phrases like "self-soothing friend," "a way to give form to my myriad emotions" and "has brought me gifts of courage, depth and presence."

Stay online and browse u-k-u-l-e-l-e. Add your city or province. Eureka! A world beckons on-screen with music stores that stock a mind-boggling array of models and supplies, lifetimes of free video lessons and even a new online magazine, *Ukulele*. And new friends await in the ever-growing online clubs, groups, jams and circles, packed with fellow travellers on a musical journey.

Spend a little time on the site of the uke group nearest you. In the highly unlikely event there isn't one, start one yourself. The Vancouver Ukulele Circle (www.vcn.bc.ca/vanukes/) is led by the local "King of the Ukulele," Ralph Shaw. It's the oldest ukulele club on the continent, with 600 names on its email list.

Get uke-in' The ukulele's back

The Circle posts the following invite on its website: "Come and experience the folk music of the new millennium. Ukulele is where it's at! You say you can't sing and can barely play? No problem! Quality is not an issue. We do this for fun. Sing as loud and free as you like because everyone else (over 100 people) is doing the same."

Also bookmark Ruby's Ukes, Vancouver's ukulele school with classes, workshops and Vancouver's Ukulele festival (www.rubysukes.ca). As noted on the website, it's "a haven... for all things ukulele" and was featured in the national radio doc *Four Little Strings*.

The ultimate must-see (and hear) website is the Langley Ukulele Ensemble at www.langleyukes.com. Their motto is "enriching lives through music," which is what they've been doing since a force-of-nature named Peter Luongo arrived centre-stage in 1980. He created a phenomenal legacy that includes the release of 13 recordings (demonstrating remarkable versatility), before passing the director's uke on to his son.

LUE was featured in the charming documentary *Mighty Uke: The Amazing Comeback of a Musical Underdog*. "An absolute delight," opined famed movie critic Leonard Maltin while watching the BC ensemble tear up *Flight of the Bumblebee* and *William Tell Overture*. Alumni include virtuoso James Hill, internationally recognized as one of the finest uke players and composers on the planet and dubbed by CBC's Stuart McLean, the "Wayne Gretzky of ukulele."

A little history

In 1879, Portuguese immigrants arrived in Honolulu with a small-bodied, four-stringed braguinha. Islanders

were enchanted and the landing made front-page news. Edward Purvis, Assistant Chamberlain to the king (Kalakaua, not Elvis) became especially adept. He

No matter how you say it or spell it, this happy, humble, under-appreciated, much-maligned runt of the guitar family litter is the come-back kid of musical instruments.

was a small, energetic man, nicknamed "ukulele," Hawaiian for "jumping flea." Among the most enthusiastic aficionados were members of the royal family and it ascended to the Islands' instrument of choice.



In 1915, at San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition, the relatively new US territory got a chance to strut and strum its stuff, featuring hula dancing and strumming ukuleles, igniting a really crazy craze. Companies churned ukes out; even department stores sold them. Tin Pan Alley songwriters cranked out endless uke-centred novelties, including my favourite: *Oh!*

How She Could Yacki Hacki Wicki Wacki Woo (That's Love in Honolulu). The romantic, carefree, highly portable and acoustic ukulele took the Hit Parade, the silver screen and the planet by storm, replete with boater hats and Hawaiian shirts.

It has surfed through whitecaps of popularity and troughs of musty comic proddom. In the 50s, folks tuned their new TVs to *Arthur Godfrey and his Ukulele* four nights a week with on-air lessons. Millions of plastic models – called TV Pals – were sold. These wretched toys and Tiny Tim's novelty tune *Tiptoe Through the Tulips* helped put ukes down, but never TKO'd them.

Fast forward to the 90s and a much different tune. Israel Kamakawiwo'ole was all over the place with his 1993 medley of *Over the Rainbow* and *What a Wonderful World* especially in TV commercials soundtracks. When YouTube was created, one of the first videos to go viral was Jake Shimabukuro's rendition of a George Harrison (a uke devotee, himself) masterpiece *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*. At 12 million hits, Jake's

career was launched. Thousands of videos have followed as the low-tech uke went high-tech. Hopefully, it's here to stay.


A few tips

Ukuleles come in four registers: soprano, concert, tenor and baritone. The first is, by far, the most popular. Walk into any music store and pick up and plink the least intimidating of all instruments. For \$50, you can walk out with a ukulele, picked from all sorts of sizes, colours and shapes, with a gig bag, felt pick and pitch pipe thrown in. Add a few dollars and you have a much less fickle friend for life, barring a yuckee mishap. It will be easier to tune, stay in tune longer, fret better (and we all need a friend that frets well) and outlast you and your kids. Second-hand ukes used to be for sale everywhere for a song and they still show up at yard sales now and then. Look for solid wood; a new Martin Style 5K will set you back five grand. If you've got one in the attic, basement or garage, dust it off and take it to a repair person to be set up and re-strung. Get uke-in'.

Do you a world of good. Or put one under a tree and say "Merry Ukulele" all year, every year.

Bruce Mason is a Vancouver and Gabriola-Island based five-string banjo player, gardener, freelance writer and author of *Our Clinic*. brucemason@shaw.ca

Vancouver ukulele nights

The Vancouver Ukulele Circle hosts a ukulele night on the third Tuesday of each month at St. James Hall, 3214 W. 10th Ave. @ Trutch. \$8 with or without an instrument. Doors open 6:30PM. Snacks, desserts, coffee, beer and wine are sold or bring your own food. Starts 7:30PM with everyone utilizing a must-have songbook with more than 200 tunes (\$15). Something similar and just as spirited and revolutionary is happening – or should be – in your community. 

Dreams of fame and glory

Few sporting heroes have had as precipitous a fall from grace as Lance Armstrong. He'd beaten cancer and gone on to win seven *Tour de France* titles and the Livestrong charity he founded had generated hundreds of millions of dollars for cancer survivors. But after years of aggressively fending off doping accusations, the "Armstrong lie," as a French newspaper dubbed it, could withstand no more. As the legal battles and investigations piled up, Armstrong came forth with his qualified, primetime confession to Oprah and the multi-million dollar edifice that was the Lance Armstrong brand caved in.

Oscar-winning documentary maker Alex Gibney started following Armstrong in 2009, before the doping scandal really broke loose. Gibney was originally making a comeback story, a film he called *The Road Back*, about Armstrong's emergence from retirement in a quest to win his eighth *Tour*. That all changed as former teammates began to expose Armstrong's deceptions. And for Gibney, not only did he have to re-evaluate what he was doing with his film, but it also became personal. Putting himself in the frame, the director felt compelled, with *The Armstrong Lie*, to tell the audience he felt cheated, like another cog in the Armstrong branding machine. Gibney demanded an on-camera explanation, providing a telling interview. Armstrong's greatest regret appears to be that he got caught.

The narrative of Gibney's two-hour documentary is thorough but feels a little choppy as it jumps from the drama and hoopla of the *Tour* to interviews putting Armstrong's doping activities within the context of a culture of doping. Armstrong himself remains something of an enigma. We see how the fatherless boy,



Photo of Lance Armstrong by Maryse Alberti, courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics. From *The Armstrong Lie*.


turned angry young man, managed to channel his fierce competitiveness in a positive way to fight cancer. But he was also a domineering bully who made life a misery for anyone who threatened to expose him.

I'm looking forward to the Coen brothers' latest movie, the comic drama *Inside Llewyn Davis*, due for release on Christmas Day. A meditation on the trials and tribulations of artistic ambition, it follows a struggling solo singer-songwriter as he finds himself at a career crossroads on the Greenwich Village folk scene

in the winter of 1961. The reviews from Cannes were very favourable. Parallels have been drawn with the Coens' earlier musical drama, 1930s-set *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* with its strong period soundtrack and the way the titular character, played by a bushy-haired Oscar Isaac, finds himself on a Homeric-like odyssey of misadventures – much of his own creation – in his bid to make a career breakthrough.

Coen fans should also note Vancity Theatre has timed a Coen brothers mini retrospective over Christmas, dubbed Coenpalooza! with screenings of old faves such as *Raising Arizona*, *Barton Fink* and *The Big Lebowski*.

Another to watch for at Vancity Theatre is *The Summit*

(from the 6th). On a cloudless day on August 1, 2008, 25 climbers attempted to scale the Himalayan peak of K2. Eleven never came back. Debut director Nick Ryan attempts to uncover the mystery of what happened that fateful day, on the world's second highest and one of the most deadly mountains, using first person accounts, reenactments and footage shot by climbers. 

Robert Alstead is making *Running on Climate*, www.runningonclimate.com

GMOs offer no benefits



soy can transfer into the DNA of bacteria living our bodies.

After GMOs were introduced (1996), Americans with three or more chronic illnesses jumped from 7% to 13% in nine years, food allergies skyrocketed and autism, reproductive disorders, digestive problems and others are on the rise. Doctors' groups such as the AAEM are warning to not wait before protecting ourselves, especially children, as more potential dangers are clearly identified.

The fact that GMOs contaminate forever – already causing losses for farmers who struggle to keep their crops pure – is a major concern. So is rapidly increasing herbicide use. Between 1996 and 2008, US farmers sprayed an extra 383 million pounds, resulting in herbicide resistant “superweeds,” requiring ever more toxic herbicide, causing environmental harm and higher residues. Roundup, for example, is linked with sterility, hormone disruption, birth defects and cancer.

Dangerous side effects are created by mixing genes from totally unrelat-

ed species; the very process of creating a GM plant can result in massive collateral damage producing new toxins, allergens, carcinogens and nutritional deficiencies.

Fifth on the AAEM list is lax government regulations, justified by the specious claim that GM food is not substantially different, despite overwhelming scientific consensus of unpredictable, hard-to-detect side effects and urgent need for long-term safety studies. An example of corporate influence is the appointment of former Monsanto attorney and vice-president Michael Taylor to US food safety czar, actively promoting biotechnology.

In the past, companies such as Monsanto made claims that Agent Orange, PCBs and DDT were safe and are now utilizing similar superficial and rigged research. Independent scientists are demonstrating without a doubt that industry funded research avoids finding problems and distorts and denies adverse findings while other research and reports are attacked and suppressed.

Despite widespread claims, GMOs do not increase yields. In fact, they work against feeding a hungry world. Sustainable non-GMO agricultural methods in developing countries have resulted in increases of 79% and higher, while GMOs do not, on average, increase yields at all. That is confirmed by the Union of Concerned Scientists' 2009 report “Failure to Yield,” the definitive study to-date.

As well, the International Assessment of Agricultural

Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report – authored by more than 400 scientists and backed by 58 governments – states, “Assessment lags behind development, information is anecdotal and contradictory and uncertainty about possible benefits and damage is unavoidable.” It found current GMOs offer nothing to goals of reducing hunger and poverty, improving nutrition, health, rural livelihoods and social and environmental sustainability. In fact, GMOs divert money and resources from safe, reliable and appropriate technologies.

Finally, avoiding GMOs contributes to the coming tipping point of consumer rejection, forcing them out of our food supply. Because GMOs offer no consumer benefits, if even a small percentage rejects brands that contain them, GM ingredients will become a marketing

These are the real and present functions of GMO biotechnology. They are not saviours of the poor and the hungry, nor are they gifts to farmers, consumers or the land. They are tools to grow biotech profits and consolidate corporate control over the food system. – Curt Ries

liability. The Campaign for Healthier Eating in America is designed to achieve a tipping point against GMOs, estimating that goal can be reached if just five percent actively shop for non-GMOs. The key is continuing to educate the public about the increasing documented health dangers and making avoiding GMOs much easier.

In a wide-ranging op-ed “GMOs for Profit: The Missing Context of Industrial Agriculture” (Truthout, November 13, 2013) Curt Ries concludes, “It is not what GMOs are that should demand so much attention, but rather, what they do, what they allow and facilitate. In our system of industrial agriculture, their role is unambiguous: To help destructive monocultures become even more productive and, thus, even more destructive to soils and communities; to make farmers increasingly dependent upon and indebted to profit-obsessed corporations; to put at risk the diversity and resilience of our food supply; to facilitate the propagation of disease from agricultural pollutants and unhealthy foods; to contaminate ecosystems and contribute to climate change.

“These are the real and present functions of GMO biotechnology. They are not saviours of the poor and the hungry, nor are they gifts to farmers, consumers or the land. They are tools to grow biotech profits and consolidate corporate control over the food system,” he concludes. ■

“There is no scientific consensus on the safety of genetically modified foods and crops,” the European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility has declared unconditionally. Dr. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker, head of the International Resource Panel (UNEP) and Club of Rome, adds, “The future of food and agriculture is one of the great challenges of humankind of the 21st century. The claim of scientific consensus on GMO safety is misleading and misrepresents diverse and inconclusive scientific evidence. The full range of scientific research needs to be taken into account, in open, transparent and honest debates which involve the broader society, when decisions of global concern are being made.”

The world is awash in GMO information, especially on the web. To separate the wheat from the chaff, it is essential to periodically review the reliable. The Institute for Responsible Technology – “the most comprehensive source of GMO health risk information on the web” – lists 10 reasons to avoid GMOs, a useful checklist and summary, highlighted here:

The fact that GMOs are unhealthy tops the list. The American Academy of Environmental Medicine urges doctors to prescribe non-GMO diets, citing animal studies indicating organ damage, gastrointestinal and immune system disorders, accelerated aging and infertility. It reports human studies show GM foods leave material behind inside of us; for example, genes inserted into

ability, security and safety of the global food system. It supports agroecological, farmer-based systems that conserve soil, water, and energy and that produce healthy and nutritious food free from unnecessary toxins. It challenges the use of pesticides, artificial fertilizer and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on the grounds of the scientifically proven hazards that they pose to health and the environment and because of the negative social and economic impacts of these technologies. Earth Open Source holds that our crop seeds and food system are common goods that belong in the hands of farmers and citizens, not of the GMO and chemical industry. Earth Open Source has established three lines of action, each of which fulfils a specific aspect of its mission: 1) Science and policy platform 2) Scientific research 3) Sustainable rural development.

Science and policy

Because the quality of our food supply is intimately connected with political and regulatory decisions, for example, on pesticides and GMOs, Earth Open Source functions as a science and policy platform to provide input to decision makers on issues relating to the safety, security and sustainability of our food system.

Earth Open Source has published and co-published several reports that have had impact internationally:

- *Roundup and birth defects: Is the public being kept in the dark?*

- *GM Soy: Sustainable? Responsible?*

- *Conflicts on the menu: A decade of industry influence at the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)*

- *Europe's pesticide and food safety regulators – Who do they work for?*

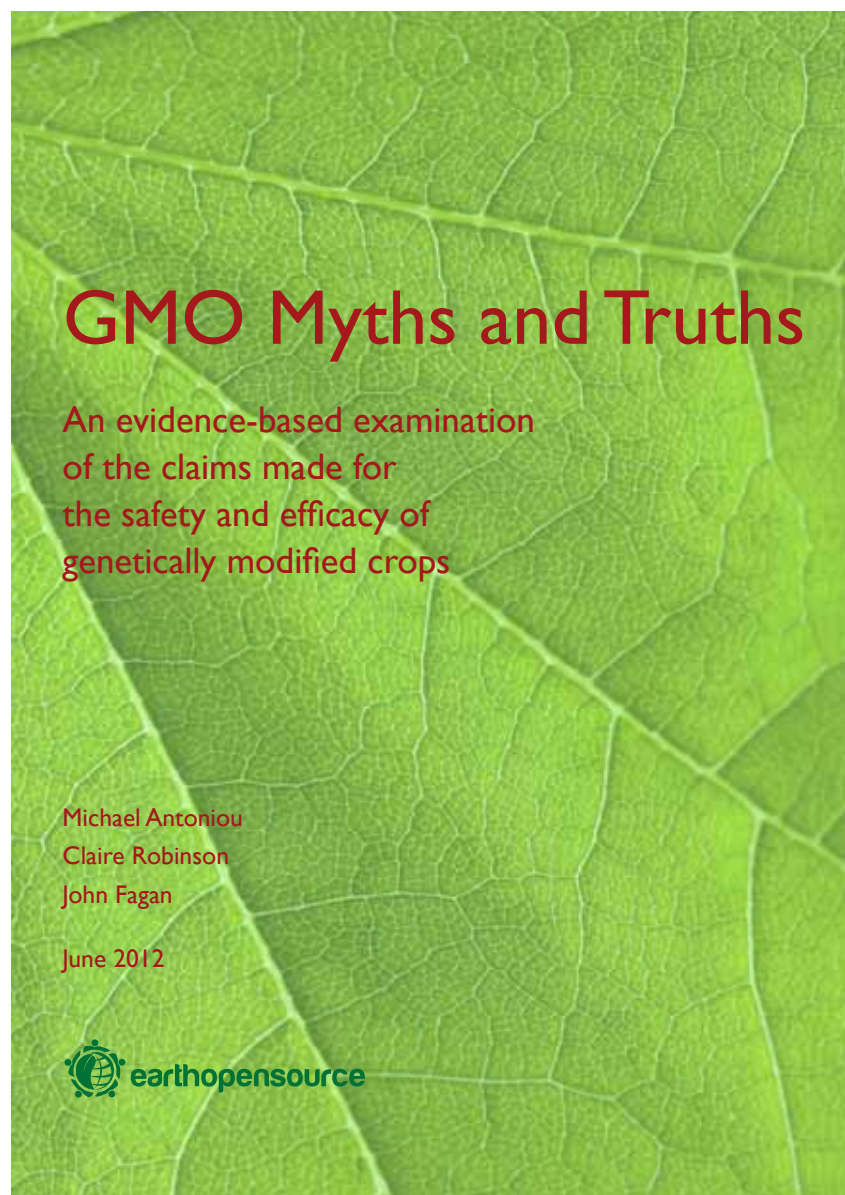
Scientific research and sustainable rural development

Earth Open Source has laboratory and field research projects under way on several continents. Farmer-led agricultural development projects are ongoing in Asia. Details will be released as these projects come to fruition.

Executive summary

Genetically modified (GM) crops are promoted on the basis of a range of far-reaching claims from the GM crop industry and its supporters. They say that GM crops:

- Are an extension of natural breeding and do not pose different risks from naturally bred crops.
- Are safe to eat and can be more nutritious than naturally bred crops.
- Are strictly regulated for safety.
- Increase crop yields.
- Reduce pesticide use.
- Benefit farmers and make their lives easier.



- Bring economic benefits.
- Benefit the environment.
- Can help solve problems caused by climate change.
- Reduce energy use.
- Will help feed the world.

However, a large and growing body of scientific and other authoritative evidence shows that these claims are not true. On the contrary, evidence presented in this report indicates that GM crops:

- Are laboratory-made, using technology that is totally different from natural breeding methods and pose different risks from non-GM crops.
- Can be toxic, allergenic or less nutritious than their natural counterparts.
- Are not adequately regulated to ensure safety.
- Do not increase yield potential.
- Do not reduce pesticide use but increase it.
- Create serious problems for farmers, including herbicide-tolerant "superweeds," compromised soil quality and increased disease susceptibility in crops.
- Have mixed economic effects.
- Harm soil quality, disrupt ecosystems, and reduce biodiversity.

- Do not offer effective solutions to climate change.
- Are as energy-hungry as any other chemically-farmed crops.
- Cannot solve the problem of world hunger but distract from its real causes – poverty, lack of access to food and, increasingly, lack of access to land to grow it on.

Based on the evidence presented in this report, there is no need to take risks with GM crops when effective, readily available and sustainable solutions to the problems that GM technology is claimed to address already exist. Conventional plant breeding, in some cases helped by safe modern technologies like gene mapping and marker assisted selection, continues to outperform GM in producing high-yield, drought-tolerant and pest- and disease-resistant crops that can meet our present and future food needs.

Myth of the Month #1

The genetic engineering technique

Myth: Genetic engineering is just an extension of natural breeding.

Truth: Genetic engineering is different from natural breeding and poses special risks.

GM proponents claim that genetic engineering is just an extension of natural plant breeding. They say that GM crops are no different from naturally bred crops, apart from the inserted foreign GM gene (transgene) and its protein product. But this is misleading.

GM is completely different from natural breeding and poses different risks. Natural breeding can only take place between closely related forms of life (e.g. cats with cats, not cats with dogs; wheat with wheat, not wheat with tomatoes or fish). In this way, the genes that carry information for all parts of the organism are passed down the generations in an orderly way.

In contrast, GM is a laboratory-based technique that is completely different from natural breeding. The main stages of the genetic modification process are as follows:

1. In a process known as tissue culture or cell culture, tissue from the plant that is to be genetically modified is placed in culture.

2. Millions of the tissue cultured plant cells are subjected to the GM gene insertion process. This results in the GM gene(s) being inserted into the DNA of a few of the plant cells in tissue culture. The inserted DNA is intended to re-programme the cells' genetic blueprint, conferring completely new properties on the cell. This process is carried out either by using a device known as a gene gun, which shoots the GM gene into the plant cells, or by linking the GM gene to a special piece of DNA present in the soil bacterium, *continued p.34...*

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 Introduction 7.30 pm \$10; Course \$395 + GST.
 Pacific Institute of Reflexology (604) 875-8818,
www.pacificreflexology.com

DEC 7 & DEC 13

School of Groove Fundraising Events: In
 Support of Music Education for Children and
 Youth in Vancouver. Dec 7: Our Town Cafe, 245
 E. Broadway. Dec. 13, Wired Monk, 2610 West
 4th Ave. Music of Cuba, Mexico and Brazil. 8
 PM. schoolofgroovevancouver.com

DEC 8

**J.Krishnamurti in Beyond Myth and
Tradition** series with Evelyne Blau: What is a
 Religious Life? Free DVD showing, dialogue,
 refreshments. Church of Truth, Victoria, BC.
 2PM. Look us up on and register at
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DEC 14

**Healing With Scientific Certainty Through
the Christ** – Free lecture: Christine Driessen,
 10AM-12NOON, First Church of Christ Scientist,
 New Westminster, 633-8th St.

DEC 14

Integral Vision of Buddhism by Ven. Zhihan:
 Systematic approach to the study and practice
 of Buddhism. 2-4PM. Universal Buddhist
 Temple 525 E.49 Ave., Vancouver.
bodhiyana.ca@gmail.com 778-709-5589.

DEC 14

Raw Vegan Meal for the Holidays / Angele
 Castonguay. FREE, 2PM. Meditation & Ecology
 Centre, 11011 Shell Rd., Richmond. Pre-register
 by Dec. 11. Linda: 604-985-5840.

DEC 15

J.Krishnamurti in Beyond Myth and Tradition
 series with Evelyne Blau: Meditation. Free DVD
 showing, dialogue, refreshments. Vancouver
 Public Library downtown, 7th Floor, Board
 Breakout Room, 2PM. Look us up on and
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DEC 15

Meditation for Inner & Outer Peace – Free Intro
 Workshop. 2PM, Meditation & Ecology Centre,
 11011 Shell Rd., Richmond. Info/ Registration:
 Linda: 604-985-5840. Drop-ins welcome.

DEC 28-DEC 29

Secrets of Daoist Rejuvenation I & II, Saturday-
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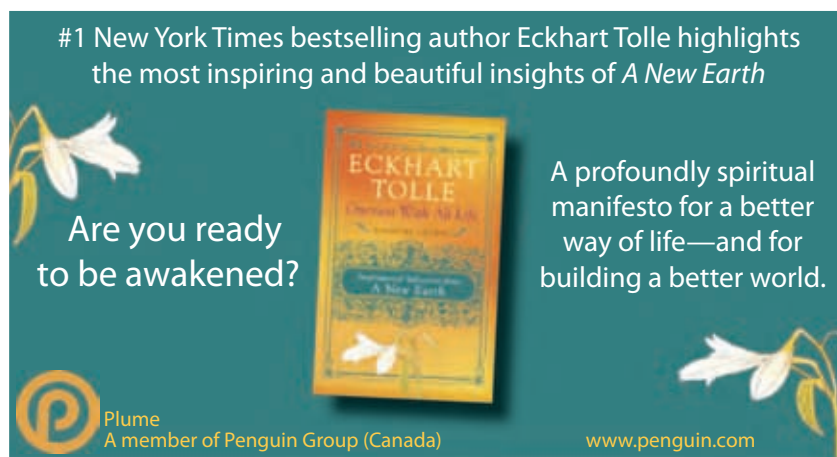
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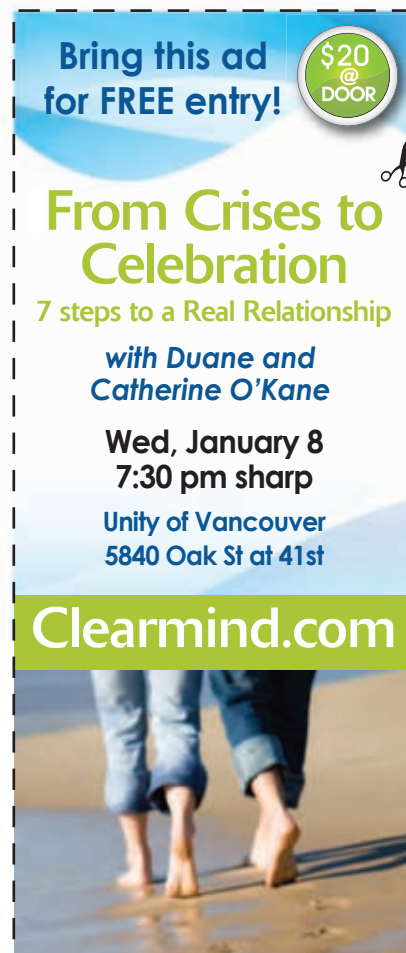
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and implement a plan to protect Zenú, but they remain at risk of extermination.

The FTA was implemented in 2011. Two-way trade totaled more than \$1.4 billion in 2010, when Canadian investment in Colombia was \$824 million, primarily in oil, gas and mining. This is growing exponentially as the Harper government vigorously promotes further resource extraction, without human rights guarantees.

Canadian companies secure government permits to operate, despite complaints by Indigenous peoples that their right to be involved in decision-making is routinely denied. Projects coincide with contamination and health problems, as well as militarization and violence, forcing entire communities to flee.

In 2012, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights heard testimony about impacts of large-scale mining, including environmental contamination, the loss of plants and food crops, and increased cancer rates.

Independent UN expert on indigenous people's rights, James Anaya, said natural resource extraction and other major development projects in, or near, Indigenous territory constitute one of the most significant sources human rights abuses, calling for a visit by

the UN's Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide.

Last year, Canada and Colombia signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation. Minister Peter MacKay reported: "current areas of collaboration include military exercises, military training, and defence policy talks," and other opportunities include "knowledge sharing on counter-improvised explosive devices."

Asserting the FTA gave Canada more influence to press for human rights, the Harper government also signed agreements covering labour and environmental cooperation. Pressure must be brought to honour these, as well as trade deals.

To host the exhibit in your community, visit the Amnesty Canada website.

You will also be invited to join Writeathon, the world's largest letter-writing event, held on International Human Rights Day, December 10th. In more than 80 countries, governments will be pressed to respond to human rights abuses, including forced evictions and effects of extractive resource activity.

Last year, nearly two million messages were sent. If you're concerned about Canada's rapidly deteriorating reputation and record, visit www.amnesty.ca. ■



"No more exploitation of natural resources. Yes to Life" Message from a Wayúu woman.

... *GMO Myths from p.31*

Agrobacterium tumefaciens. When the *A. tumefaciens* infects a plant, the GM gene is carried into the cells and can insert into the plant cell's DNA.

3. At this point in the process, the genetic engineers have a tissue culture consisting of hundreds of thousands to millions of plant cells. Some have picked up the GM gene(s), while others have not. The next step is to treat the culture with chemicals to eliminate all except those cells that have successfully incorporated the GM gene into their own DNA.

4. Finally, the few cells that survive the chemical treatment are treated with plant hormones. The hormones stimulate these genetically modified plant cells to proliferate and differentiate into small GM plants that can be transferred to soil and grown on.

5. Once the GM plants are growing, the genetic engineer examines them and eliminates any that do not seem to be growing well. He/she then does tests on the remaining plants to identify one or more that express the GM genes at high levels. These are selected as candidates for commercialization.

6. The resulting population of GM plants all carry and express the GM genes of interest. But they have not been assessed for health and environmental safety or nutritional value...

The fact that the GM transformation process is artificial does not automatically make it undesirable or dangerous. It is the consequences of the procedure that give cause for concern.

Section at a glance

Genetic engineering is completely different from natural breeding and entails different risks. The genetic engineering and associated tissue culture processes are imprecise and highly mutagenic, leading to unpredictable

changes in the DNA, proteins and biochemical composition of the resulting GM crop that can lead to unexpected toxic or allergenic effects and nutritional disturbances.

Foods produced by cisgenic or intragenic methods are as hazardous as any other GM crop. It is misleading to compare GM with radiation-induced mutation breeding and to conclude that, as crops bred by the latter method are not tested for safety or regulated, neither should GM crops be tested or regulated. Radiation-induced mutation breeding is potentially even more mutagenic than GM and at least as destructive to gene expression, and crops produced by this method should be regulated at least as strictly as GM crops.

It is unnecessary to take risks with GM when conventional breeding – assisted by safe modern gene mapping technologies – is capable of meeting our crop breeding needs.

Muddying the waters with imprecise terms

GM proponents often use the terminology relating to genetic modification incorrectly to blur the line between genetic modification and conventional breeding.

For example, the claim that conventional plant breeders have been "genetically modifying" crops for centuries by selective breeding and that GM crops are no different is incorrect. The term "genetic modification" is recognized in common usage and in national and international laws to refer to the use of recombinant DNA techniques to transfer genetic material between organisms in a way that would not take place naturally, bringing about alterations in genetic makeup and properties.

The term "genetic modification" is sometimes wrongly used to describe marker-assisted selection (MAS). MAS is a largely uncontroversial branch of biotechnology that can speed up conventional breeding by identifying genes

linked to important traits. MAS does not involve the risks and uncertainties of genetic modification and is supported by organic and sustainable agriculture groups worldwide.

Similarly, the term "genetic modification" is sometimes wrongly used to describe tissue culture, a method that is used to select desirable traits or to reproduce whole plants from plant cells in the laboratory. In fact, while genetic modification of plants as carried out today is dependent on the use of tissue culture, tissue culture is not dependent on GM. Tissue culture can be used for many purposes, independent of GM.

Using the term "biotechnology" to mean genetic modification is inaccurate. Biotechnology is an umbrella term that includes a variety of processes in which biological functions are harnessed for various purposes. For instance, fermentation, as used in wine making and baking, marker assisted selection (MAS) and tissue culture, as well as genetic modification, are all biotechnologies. Agriculture itself is a biotechnology, as are commonly used agricultural methods such as the production of compost and silage.

GM proponents' misleading use of language may be due to unfamiliarity with the field – or may represent deliberate attempts to blur the lines between controversial and uncontroversial technologies in order to win public acceptance of GM. ■

Excerpted from **GMO Myths and Truths**, an evidence-based examination of the claims made for the safety and efficacy of genetically modified crops. Version 1.3b by **Michael Antoniou, Claire Robinson and John Fagan** © Earth Open Source, www.earthopensource.org Earth Open Source functions as a science and policy platform to provide input to decision-makers on issues relating to the safety, security and sustainability of our food system.

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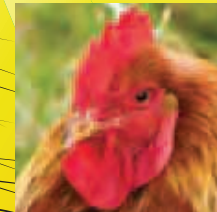
CATCHING THE WAVE

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Changing your mind



The ancients pointed to higher awareness using many names – enlightenment, moksha, bodhi, kensho, satori, kevala jnana are but a few.

In our modern world, we live so deeply in a limited mindset and it is the source of so many people not being happy, healthy and living a life of ease. In this limited mindset we are consumed with irritation, worry, aggression, and fear – these are habitual unhelpful patterns of conditioned reactivity.

Stress is the name we use for the condition that envelops all the symptoms of the limited mindset. Stress is energy draining and takes us away from our true inspired selves.

On some level we know that our natural state is one without stress,

where we can endure the rapid pace of life without difficulty, where we experience joy and where our mind is clear. But most of us have lost the understanding and appreciation of the true holistic way and we live detached from nature and this greater way of being.

For thousands of years, mushrooms have been used to bring a change in perspective and a change in awareness, and have brought people closer to an understanding of their authentic selves. In this state, we know what is true and real, and happiness, wellness and ease become our norm.

Changing the way your mind works is the first step to recovering your true personal power and ease. We call this Changing Your Mind. We invite you to take a small step in the direction of finding the greater you. For one week, try this simple program, and when you're done, please share with us how you feel (changeyourmind@purica.com)

7 DAY CHANGE YOUR MIND PROGRAM

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Breathe in a relaxed deep way as much as possible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend 5 minutes alone in silence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wear a smile inside your mind	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Smile to everyone you meet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Think of one thing that you feel grateful for today	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Try Purica Mushrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Absolute Best Mushrooms available

Purica sources the highest quality mushrooms available today. We micronize them - grinding them almost to the size of blood cell, so your body can absorb the entire mushroom. Micronizing adds 5 to 10 times the potency of our exceptional raw material and all the naturally occurring active ingredients are preserved in this process.



- Stress Relief
- Antioxidant (SOD)
- Immune Enhancement



- Stress Relief
- Sleep Support
- Energy & Stamina Boost



- Stress Relief
- Clarity of Mind
- Memory Support



- Adrenal Exhaustion
- Immune Enhancement
- Energy & Libido Boost